

Council Forum

Thursday, 26 January 2017

18:00

Council Chamber, Blackburn Town Hall,

AGENDA

PART I: ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PUBLIC

- 1 Chief Executive to read the notice convening the meeting
- 2 Prayers by the Mayor's Chaplain
- 3 Apologies for absence
- 4 Minutes of the Previous Meeting
Minutes Policy Council - 1st December 2016 5 - 12
- 5 Declarations of Interest
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FORM 13 - 14
- 6 Mayoral Communications
- 7 Council Forum
To consider questions from members of the public received under Procedure Rule 10.
- 8 To consider motions submitted under Procedure Rule 12
Two Notices of Motion has been submitted under Procedure Rule 12 as follows:
MOTIONS JAN 2017 15 - 16
- 9 Council Tax Support Scheme
Report of the Executive Member for Resources.
Council Tax Support Scheme 2017 18 17 - 20
- 10 Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)
Report of the Executive Member for Resources.
Review of MRP Policy Report to Council Forum 21 - 26
Jan 2017 v5 @ 18Jan2017
- 11 Arrangements for the Appointment of External Auditors
Report of the Executive Member for Resources.

	Report to Council Forum re Ext Auditor Appmt 0.3	27 - 32
	Appendix to Report re Arrangements for the Appoinment of External Auditors.doc	33 - 38
12	Local Government Boundary Commission England Draft Warding Report	
	Report of the Lead Officer, BwDBC Local Government Boundary Review. Local Government Boundary Review Council Warding Report	39 - 42
13	Policy and Corporate Resources Committee	
	Report of the Chair and Vice Chair of Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee. PCR Council report 260117.3.0	43 - 44
14	Reports of Executive Members with Portfolios	
14.1	leaders report.Jan 2017	45 - 48
14.2	Council Forum - Adult Services Public Health - January 2017	49 - 50
14.3	CS CF report 26 Jan 17 V2	51 - 52
14.4	Final Environment Council Forum Submission	53 - 54
14.5	Final Council Forum Report 26-1-17 CLS	55 - 58
14.6	Nhoods & Prevention Council Forum Report Jan 17	59 - 62
14.7	Resources Council Forum Report January 2017	63 - 64
14.8	Schools and Education CF 26_1_17 v3 DH	65 - 66
14.9	Regen Council Forum Jan 17	67 - 68
15	To consider any questions received from Members under Procedure Rule 11.	

PART 2: ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

Date Published: Friday, 27 January 2017
Harry Catherall, Chief Executive

POLICY COUNCIL MEETING
Thursday 1st December 2016

PRESENT – Councillor H. Akhtar (*in the Chair*), Councillors Akhtar P., Ali, Bateson, Brookfield, Casey, Connor, Daley, Davies, Desai, Entwistle, Foster D., Foster k., Gee, Groves, Gunn, Hardman, Harling, Hollings, Humphrys, Hussain F., Hussain S., Jan-Virmani, Kay, Khan M., Khan Z., Khonat S., Liddle, Mahmood A., Mahmood Q., Marrow, Maxfield, McFall, McGurk, Mulla, Murray, Nuttall, Oates, Patel, Pearson J., Rigby C., Riley, Roberts, Shorrock, Sidat, Slater Jacqueline, Slater John, Slater Julie., Slater Neil., Smith D., Smith J., Surve, Talbot, Tapp, Taylor, Vali, Whittle and Wright.

RESOLUTIONS

38. Notice Convening Meeting

The Chief Executive read the notice convening the meeting.

At this point of the meeting a minutes silence will be observed in memory of Councillor Mike Johnson, Lord Taylor and former Councillor Freda Barker.

39. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Fazal, Hussain I., Lee, McKinlay and Rigby J.

The Leader of the Council made reference to the ongoing ill health of Councillor Don McKinlay and requested Policy Council grant a dispensation for his ongoing absence – which was agreed unanimously.

40. Minutes of the Council Forum Meeting held on 6th October 2016.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Council Forum meeting held on 6th October 2016 be approved as a correct record.

41. Declarations of interest

No Declarations of Interest were received.

42. Petition relating to the proposed introduction of car parking charges on two car pars at Witton Country Park

Council received a report relating to a petition that had been received objecting to proposals to introduce car parking charges at Witton Park. The petition contained over 4,200 signatures and under the Constitution therefore required debate at a meeting of the Full Council.

The comment which accompanied the petition is stated below:

“Do not implement Witton Park car parking charges as this will have a huge impact on the local and wider community. We need to encourage people to become healthy and happy in our community and this facility encouraging many people to do this. Charging a car park fee will only deter people from coming to Witton Park and to Blackburn and we feel that this is the wrong thing to do”.

Policy Council were advised that the Petition Organiser would be given 5 minutes to present the petition at the meeting. The Executive Member would then have up to 10 minutes to respond and present his report. The Petition would then be debated by Members for a maximum of 15 minutes.

The Council would then decide how to respond to the Petition, with three options being available: 1. Take the action requested in the Petition; 2. Not to take the action stated in the Petition; or 3. Commission further investigation to the matter, for example by a relevant Committee.

In the absence of the Lead Petitioner the Executive Member for Leisure Culture and Young People responded to the petition, moving the report he wished to thank Abby Bartlett for taking the trouble of collecting the petition signatories. Mindful of the interest that had been generated by the petition, Councillor Talbot reminded Policy Council of the July Council Forum meeting where the decision had been made regarding Witton Park, and the significant budget pressures the Council faced, coupled with no credible alternatives to the introduction of charges.

Following a brief discussion, a Named Vote was requested. Policy Council voted on the recommendations in the original report as follows:

For

Councillors: Akhtar (H), Bateson, Brookfield, Casey, Desai, Entwistle, Groves, Gunn, Harling, Hollings, Humphrys, Hussain (F), Hussain (S), Jan-Virmani, Kay, Khan (M), Khan (Z), Khonat (S), Liddle, Mahmood (A), Mahmood (Q), McFall, McGurk, Mulla, Nuttall, Oates, Patel, Riley, Roberts, Shorrock, Sidat, Smith (D), Smith (J), Surve, Talbot, Taylor, Vali, Whittle, Wright.

Against

Councillors: None.

Abstention

Councillors: Ali, Connor, Daley, Davies, Foster (D), Foster (K), Gee, Hardman, Marrow, Murray, Pearson, Rigby (C), Slater (Ja), Slater (Jo), Slater (Ju), Slater (N), Tapp.

RESOLVED –

That

1. Members noted the petition and;
2. Maintain the current proposals to introduce parking charges on the two main car parks in Witton Country Park

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.

43. Corporate Plan and priorities to 2020

A report was submitted outlining the Corporate Plan and priorities to 2020.

In line with the Council's policy and decision making framework, the report provided an update on the six corporate priorities, the key strategies in place to achieve these priorities, the budget context, policy challenges and the future direction for the Council.

The Leader of the Council explained that building upon previous Corporate Plans and the Corporate Priorities, the report proposed that the same corporate priorities be brought forward and used as the basis for the setting of Council policy until 2020.

It was proposed that the six Corporate Priorities and four main themes remain up to 2020:

1. Creating more jobs and supporting business growth;
2. Improving housing quality and building more houses;
3. Improving health and well-being;
4. Improving outcomes for our young people;
5. Safeguarding the most vulnerable people; and
6. Making your money go further.

The four main themes being:

1. Image and Marketing of the borough
2. Fairness/Equality/cohesion
3. Partnership working – residents/business/other key stakeholders
4. Digital First

The Chief Executive explained to Policy Council the staff briefings that had taken place, following which one of the videos shown to staff was watched by Members. The Chief Executive advised Members that there were five main key partnerships and income targets that would support key strategy and delivery of the Corporate Plan; the Hive, Together a Healthier Future, Digital First, Capita Partnership, and Your Community Your Call.

It was highlighted to Members that of the 500 redundancies initially anticipated, a significant number of voluntary redundancies had already been agreed, which would reduce the estimated total, however Policy Council were advised that a further 100-150 posts may still be required: In context it was explained that the number of compulsory redundancies throughout the whole process would be approximately 300-320.

In moving the report, the Leader of the Council emphasised that over recent years the Council had played an integral role in re-focusing existing partnerships and shaping emerging new partnerships in Blackburn with Darwen and across Lancashire: In particular the Local Strategic Partnership, the Lancashire Shadow Combined Authority and the Pennine Lancashire Transformation Programme for health and social care.

The report highlighted achievements already made over the last twelve months against each of the corporate plan priorities, whilst emphasising the backdrop in which the Council still had challenges to face, including the continued budget pressures (a further £48 million to be cut by 2020), increasing service demand, resident skill shortage, poor health outcomes, enduring health inequalities, a low wage economy, increase in crimes and the uncertainties of Brexit especially with regards to European Union funding.

Specific financial challenges facing Blackburn with Darwen were referenced: The adult social care budget caused by rising demands from an ageing and increasingly vulnerable adult population (on average £1.5m-£2m increase per annum in the Borough) and the National Living Wage (approx. £1m cost per year).

The report outlined where the Council wanted to be and the journey it would need to take to get there: Members were reminded that Local Government was expected to be more self-sufficient, reflecting the changes to the way councils received their income. To support this, a series of measures were referenced; an increase in business rate and Council Tax base to secure long term sustainability and new ways of working, fully utilising technology, having a more commercial outlook to public sector service provision, focussing on new ways to deliver services, facilitating the community to become increasingly self-sufficient in the way it engaged and received support from a modernised and flexible Council, with more limited resources than ever before. Further detail was referenced in an update on the Medium Term Financial Strategy elsewhere on the agenda for how it would help to ensure the Council had the revenue to support and invest in its priorities leading to improved outcomes for residents in the Borough.

In summation the Leader explained that despite the financial challenges that had affected all Council services, and the knock on impact this would have for residents, he emphasised that the Council had made significant progress and continued with its ambitions and commitments to improve the lives and opportunities for residents and businesses. The coming year would be a demanding and challenging time, with increasing demand on services, the

financial pressures, local government boundary review, the beginning of the process in reviewing our Core Strategy, developing new models of delivery for health and care and ensuring the Council pressed ahead and continued with a positive focus on the image of Blackburn with Darwen to encourage investment into the Borough.

There followed a debate during which several references were made to the following key areas: Adult Social Care, car parking, the Councils contribution to PCSOs, child safeguarding and bin collections.

RESOLVED –

That Policy Council:

1. Re-affirmed the Councils six corporate priorities and four themes up to 2020.
2. Approved that Executive Members through consultation review the performance measures and targets 2017/18 for their relevant portfolio.
3. Delegated final sign off of the updated performance measures and targets to the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive.
4. Noted the content of the report and consider the new models of delivery and direction of travel for the Council.

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

44. Medium Term Financial Strategy update and flexibility to use Capital receipts.

Council was provided with an update on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2016-20 and savings programme, and approval was sought to adopt the Government's flexibility in the use of capital receipts. The report referenced the MTFS and the impact of austerity since 2010/11, balancing the budget 2016/17 to 2019/20, progress to date and the flexible use of Capital receipts.

RESOLVED –

That Policy Council:

1. Noted the update on the MTFS;
2. Approved progression of the savings options outlined in Appendix A and the following, in order to close the budget gap;
3. Approved a fundamental review of in-house adult social care services for older people and adults with a learning disability, and to note that a further report detailing the outcome of the review will be brought to a future Executive Board meeting with recommendations for consideration and approval;
4. Approved a service delivery review of adolescent services and a review of supported accommodation, and to note that a further report detailing the outcome of the review will be brought to a future Executive Board meeting with recommendations for consideration and approval;

5. Approved in principle a reduction in public transport bus subsidies, and to note that a further report will be brought to a future Executive Board meeting with details of the proposed routes affected following consultation, and recommendations for consideration and approval;
6. Agreed to reduce expenditure on highways and associated infrastructure assets in the financial years 2017/18 and 2018/19;
7. Agreed to cease the Council's contribution to the Lancashire Constabulary in respect of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs); and
8. Approved the facility for flexibility in the use of capital receipts, the option for which was introduced by the Government in the 2016/17 Financial Settlement, and to note that a report detailing the proposed use of such receipts in 2016/17 will be presented to Finance Council in February 2017 for consideration and approval.

45. Revenues and Benefits digitalisation project

Council received a report setting out the digital roadmap for the Revenue and Benefits Service, and the proposed policy and procedural changes required to maximise on-line take up by customers, and provide the necessary savings and efficiencies needed to support the financial challenges facing the council.

The report outlined two options for the promotion and take-up of on-line and self-serve services: Namely;

1. Offer the online options to customers and allow take up to be incremental, i.e. as and when customers wish to use the digital modules, or;
2. Strongly promote and direct customers to the on-line and self-service modules whenever possible.

In order for the Revenues and Benefits service to deliver the expected workforce review savings, it will be necessary to strongly promote and direct customers away from the traditional contact channels of telephone, face to face and white mail to the more automated and self-service channels.

The proposed changes in relation to Council Tax, Business Rates, Housing Benefits and Council Tax support were outlined in the report submitted.

RESOLVED –

That the Executive Member for Resources be authorised to implement all digital modules listed in this report and the appropriate changes to policies and procedures that will ensure maximum customer take up.

46. Treasury management mid-year review for 2016-17 and the annual report 2015-16.

Council were updated on the Treasury Management position to date and proposed Strategy for the remainder of 2016-17, and to formally report the Treasury outturn for 2015-16, as previously reflected in reporting to Audit and Governance Committee, and in the 2015-16 Outturn Corporate Monitoring Report (14th July Executive Board).

RESOLVED –

That Policy Council

1. Agreed the continuation of the existing Treasury Management Strategy, and Treasury and Prudential Indicators for 2016-17, as set at Finance Council in March 2016, and
2. Noted the Outturn position for 2015-16.

47. Constitution Update – Section 6 Code of Governance.

Council were advised that the Constitution Section 6 Code of Corporate Governance had been updated. Following work to revise and update the Corporate Code of Governance in response to the publication by CIPFA and SOLACE of the publication “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Guidance Notes for English Authorities (2016 Edition)”. Council were further informed that the proposed updated Constitution remained publicly available on the Council’s website with the Agenda for this meeting and was available in full printed form in the Group rooms.

RESOLVED –

Policy Council agreed the amendments made to Section 6 of the Constitution Code of Corporate Governance.

48. Draft year planner 2017-18

Further to the submission of the draft year planner for 2017-18 to the last meeting of Council Forum in October, the year planner for 2017-18 was submitted for approval.

RESOLVED –

That the year planner for Policy Council noted the draft year planner for 2017-18 be approved.

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

MAYOR

MOTION 1

Road Safety

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council notes the concerns of local residents on the subject of road safety and in particular has received representation about the issues related to the hire of vehicles, whether as day hire or through leasing schemes.

Our main aim is not to unduly restrict the hiring of vehicles but to stop misuse and bring about more sensible behaviour. In moving this motion we wish to prevent people from harming themselves, others and property. We want to make Blackburn with Darwen a safer place for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians.

We resolve to ask the Chief Executive to write to the appropriate Government Department Ministers and our local MPs Kate Hollern and Jake Berry and to ask them to work with the relevant insurance agencies to bring forward legislation that restricts the ability of young drivers to hire high powered vehicles for limited periods of time or for other drivers to hire such vehicles and then allow young and inexperienced drivers to use them. This practice is a cause of significant concern for our constituents and has been a contributory factor in some serious road accidents.

Mover – Councillor Shaukat Hussain

Seconder – Councillor Arshid Mahmood

MOTION 2

The government has proposed that in 2018 all voters in elections in Blackburn with Darwen will need to supply a piece of photographic evidence to prove their identity if they are going to be allowed to vote at Polling Stations. This change is being introduced to deal with the potential issue of voter impersonation although there have been no proven examples of this crime within BwD.

This change will significantly inconvenience all law abiding electors and, in some cases, will prevent them from voting because they will not be able to supply the relevant documentation. It will involve the Council in additional expensive bureaucracy and will also present serious operational problems for polling clerks who will be expected to check pieces of documentation while a large queue of angry voters builds up.

On behalf of all law abiding electors in Blackburn with Darwen, this Council calls upon the Chief Executive to make these concerns known to the Electoral Commission and we ask the two local MPs, Kate Hollern and Jake Berry,

to support this action and to use their influence within their respective political parties to stop this unnecessary attack upon the democratic rights of their constituents.

Mover: Councillor Phil Riley

Secunder: Councillor Mohammed Khan



REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF FINANCE & IT
TO:	COUNCIL FORUM
ON:	26 JANUARY 2017

SUBJECT: Council Tax Support Scheme 2017/18

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To seek approval for the adoption of the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2017/18.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) That the contents of the report are noted;
- b) That the Council Tax Support Scheme that was approved by Council in January 2016 is continued for the financial year 2017/18, and;
- c) That any subsequent technical amendments to the Council Tax Support Scheme that may be required in 2017/18 following legislative changes are delegated to the Director of Finance & IT, in consultation with the Executive Member, Resources.

3. BACKGROUND

Council Tax Support Scheme

The Welfare Reform Act contained provisions which abolished Council Tax Benefit and recommended localised schemes to be administered by Local Authorities throughout England with effect from 1st April 2013.

As a consequence of the legislation, it was agreed at full Council on 31st January 2013 that the localised scheme adopted by Blackburn with Darwen BC would be means tested in the same way as Council Tax Benefit, however, awards would be 20% less for working age claimants than the previous national scheme.

The Council has in previous years confirmed that this scheme would continue to apply each financial year. This report fulfils the Council's obligation to consider the local scheme each financial year and formally agree the provision.

4. KEY ISSUES

4.1 Council Tax Support

In preparation for setting the budget for 2017/18, the Council is obliged to formally continue the scheme already agreed or make any adjustments prior to 1st April 2017. This report seeks to fulfil the necessary legal requirements and confirm Blackburn with Darwen BC's Council Tax Support scheme for 2017/18.

There are no changes proposed to the calculation of the scheme, however, a number of minor changes relating to welfare benefits terminology have been made.

The Council Tax Support scheme has in previous years mirrored the Housing Benefit assessment process. The correlation of the two schemes has helped with customer understanding and simplified the administration process. A number of significant changes to the Housing Benefit scheme have been introduced within 2017. These changes have included, reductions in Housing Benefit payments for temporary absence, reduction in backdating claims to a maximum of 4 weeks and the removal of the family premium in the calculation for new claims and new births.

After consultation with the Executive Member for Resources, it was agreed that these changes would not be adopted within the Council Tax Support scheme at this time.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

By maintaining the same Council Tax Support scheme from 2016/17 into 2017/18 there are no significant policy changes to consider.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Whilst any increase in the number of claimants or the amount of Council Tax Support awarded would clearly increase the financial cost to the Council, the actual total award of Council Tax Support has consistently decreased over the previous four years. There was a small increase in 2016/17, however, this was as a direct result of the increase in Council Tax and the Adult Social Care precept.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Localised Council Tax Support Scheme must be agreed by Council each financial year.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no other resource implications associated with this report.

9. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

In preparing for the ending of the national Council Tax Benefit scheme and the localising of support to local authorities, the DCLG completed an initial Equality Impact Assessment in January 2012, and an updated Impact Assessment in June 2012. In addition, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council prepared a high level Equality Impact Assessment. As the scheme remains the same, the Equalities Impact Assessment is still valid and applicable for 2017/18.

10. CONSULTATIONS

The Council, as a billing authority, was required to enter into public consultation to develop and adopt a localised Council Tax Support scheme for implementation across Blackburn with Darwen from 1st April 2013. As the scheme will remain the same for 2017/18 there is no further requirement to undertake a new consultation exercise.

Chief Officer/Member

Contact Officer: Louise Mattinson, Director of Finance & IT

Date: 5th January 2017

Background Papers: Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2017/18



BRIEFING PAPER

REPORT to : Council Forum

LEAD OFFICER: Director of Finance and IT

DATE: 26th January 2017

WARD/S AFFECTED: All

REVIEW OF MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION POLICY

1. PURPOSE

A review of the Council's MRP (Minimum Revenue Provision) Policy has been undertaken and the paper presents proposals to amend the current Policy.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is proposed that the Council amends its MRP (Minimum Revenue Provision) Policy, with effect from 2016/17 as follows:-

- (a) *For capital expenditure that is self-financed from debt arising in 2007/08 and thereafter* - to continue to use the Asset Life Method, but to use the annuity variant based on the average Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) annuity rates prevailing in the year of the expenditure, rather than the current method of charging MRP on a straight line basis over the estimated life of the asset.
- (b) *For finance leases and 'on-balance sheet' Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts* - to again use the annuity variant of the Asset Life Method but using the annuity rates built into the financing arrangements, rather than the current method of matching the MRP to the value of the rent/charge that is charged each year to write down the balance sheet liability of the respective finance lease or PFI contract.
- (c) *For historic debt that was entered into prior to unitary authority status and is managed by Lancashire County Council (LCC)* - to spread the cost on a straight line basis over 49 years, in alignment with the profile for historic supported borrowing
- (d) *In those cases where asset lives cannot be readily determined* - to use a default period of 20 or 25 years in line with government guidance.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Local authorities are required each year to set aside a provision for debt repayment. Previously there were detailed rules setting out how to calculate such a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) but now, under Statutory Instrument 2008 no.414, it stipulates that:

“A local authority shall determine for the current financial year an amount of minimum revenue provision that it considers to be prudent.”

There is not a specific definition of “prudent” provision however the Government issued MRP Guidance, most recently in 2012, making recommendations to authorities on the interpretation of that term. Authorities are legally obliged to have regard to this guidance.

MRP is made each year against the Council’s total outstanding Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). This comprises;

Total capital spend financed from the Council’s own resources
LESS the use of any capital receipts or revenue provision
LESS any MRP already made.

The CFR increases each year as new capital spend financed from borrowing is incurred, and reduces as the annual MRP is made or if capital receipts are applied to the debt thereby reducing the amount of borrowing required.

The MRP Policy determines not ***what the cost is*** but ***how it is to be spread over time***.

3.2 At Council Forum in January 2016, the Council changed its approach to making MRP on supported borrowing *mainly in respect of assets financed from borrowing up to 31st March 2008*. The change involved a switch from making MRP at 4% of the relevant carrying CFR (which had reflected the notional level of historic government grant funding support) to making MRP on this element of the CFR at a straight 2% over 50 years.

3.3. During 2016/17, the Council has undertaken a further review of its MRP calculation methodology and accounting assumptions. To assist in this complex work the Council engaged the services of its Treasury Management advisors, Arlingclose, to review the policy and advise on best practice. From the review it was concluded that the current policy is very conservative compared to many other Councils and therefore we have developed recommendations for changes in our calculation methodology which will still ensure that prudent provision is made, but which will change the profile or spread of the costs over time for charges made in 2016/17 and beyond.

4. KEY ISSUES

4.1 The basis of the proposed policy change

The proposed policy change will ensure that the revenue costs of capital expenditure are more closely matched with the economic benefits received over the life of those capital assets. The net effect of the proposed changes will be to reduce MRP charges in the current and near future years, and increase them beyond that. The amended MRP charges will continue to be prudent but will be matched more appropriately to the cost of the assets over time.

There are four key areas where recommendations for change to the current policy are made. It is proposed for these to take effect from 2016/17.

4.2 MRP in respect of assets financed from prudential borrowing

This addresses the MRP in respect of those assets financed from borrowing *since 1st April 2008*. The Council’s current method of calculating MRP in respect of prudential borrowing has been to spread the cost of borrowing in a straight line over the estimated lives of the assets. On this basis, current council tax payers pay a relatively higher charge than council tax payers will do in the future, for example, using the current straight line basis an asset costing £20m to build with a life of

20 years would result in a consistent £1m charge each year however using the annuity method, the impact of inflation is taken into account thereby smoothing the charge to address the fact that £1m today has a higher value than £1m will have in 20 years' time.

The annuity method also reflects the fact that the interest costs related to an asset will reduce over time as the debt is repaid. The annuity method is therefore similar to a repayment mortgage whereby repayments of the principal or capital sum increase over time and correspondingly the related interest payments reduce, however the repayments made remains constant.

It is therefore proposed to move to an annuity based MRP calculation; whilst this will still reflect the same estimated asset lives, it will use the average PWLB annuity rates prevailing in the year of the expenditure to make the provision, based on loans with the same length to maturity as the estimated asset life.

4.3 MRP in respect of PFI (Private Finance Initiative) assets

The Council currently makes MRP equal to the element of the rent or charge that goes to write down the balance sheet liability each year. This is a form of annuity MRP, using the interest rate implicit in the financing arrangement made over the life of the PFI contract rather than the life of the asset created. It is therefore proposed to change the calculation so that the MRP reflects the assets lives rather than reflecting the financing arrangements made in respect of those assets as it does at present. We would continue to use annuity rates based on those built into the PFI financing arrangements.

Though the Council currently has no finance leases, it would be consistent to adopt a similar "asset life" MRP method should they arise. This would again mean that MRP charges would no longer equal the rent or service charge payable for the year.

4.4 MRP in respect of Debt Managed by LCC (Lancashire County Council)

Following Local Government Reorganisation in 1998, part of the historic debt relating to the Council continued to be managed by LCC and charges for the principal and interest elements of this debt are made to them each year. The Council currently makes MRP equal to the principal element of LCC's charge i.e. the amount by which the balance sheet liability is reduced or written-down each year. It is proposed to change this so that MRP more closely reflects the lives of the asset to which the finance relates, rather than the financing arrangements made in respect of those assets. As such we propose to use the same basis as for our other historic supported borrowing – i.e. straight line over 49 years. It is proposed to use 49 years rather than 50 years to reflect the fact that this change is being made one year later than the change made in 2015/16 in respect of the Council's other historic debt i.e. to bring them into line.

4.5 MRP where there are no Asset Lives to be determined

Where there are no asset lives to be determined – for example where the Council has capitalised redundancy costs - the Council has to date chosen relatively short fixed periods of time over which to spread the cost. It is proposed to standardise the approach so that MRP on expenditure that is not specifically related to fixed assets, but which has been capitalised by regulation or direction, will be charged over a 20 or 25 year period in line with the government guidance.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The policy implications are for a change in the Council's MRP Policy, as outlined above.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 MRP Savings

The impact of the proposed MRP policy changes on the Council's MRP annual charge, based on current assumptions for capital expenditure and receipts, are as follows:

	16/17 £'m	17/18 £'m	18/19 £'m	19/20 £'m	29/30 £'m	39/40 £'m	49/50 £'m
Prudential Borrowing	1.8	1.8	1.7	1.6	0.3	-0.4	-0.9
PFI Assets	1.4	1.6	1.6	1.5	3.2	-0.8	-2.0
LCC Debt	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.0	-0.1	-0.2
No assets	0.4	0.2	-0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Use of Capital receipts	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
TOTAL MRP Saving	4.4	4.6	4.2	4.0	3.5	-1.3	-3.1

6.2 Additional Interest Costs

As a result of the proposed changes to MRP policy, the Council's CFR will be higher than previously projected (as the reduction in this from the reduced MRP charge each year will be less in the near future). This will therefore reduce the Council's cash balances and will require additional borrowing.

MRP savings will therefore be offset in part by extra interest costs, but it is projected that there will still be a significant net reduction in the early years.

6.3 Net Financial Implications

The net impact of the proposed changes to MRP calculations will ultimately depend on the levels of expenditure to be financed from borrowing. Based on current assumptions, impact is forecast as follows:

	16/17 £'m	17/18 £'m	18/19 £'m	19/20 £'m	29/30 £'m	39/40 £'m	49/50 £'m
Gross MRP Saving	4.4	4.6	4.2	4.0	3.5	-1.3	-3.1
Additional interest cost	0.0	-0.1	-0.2	-0.4	-2.1	-3.2	-1.8
Net Saving (after Interest)	4.4	4.5	4.0	3.6	1.4	-4.5	-4.9

As can be seen, there are significant savings in earlier years, offset by increased costs in later years. This represents a more even spread of the costs of the Council's assets over their useful lives.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Under the Local Government Act 2003, local authorities determine locally their policies Minimum Revenue Provision. Government guidance has been developed to support local authorities in taking these decisions, and the Council is required by the Act to have regard to the guidance when determining its MRP.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

None

9. CONSULTATIONS

None

10. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

VERSION: 0.05

CONTACT OFFICER:	Ron Turvey - Deputy Finance Manager	extn 5303
	Louise Mattinson - Director of Finance and IT	extn 5600
DATE:	18 th January 2017	
BACKGROUND PAPERS:	CIPFA Guidance - CLG Investment Guidance - Council Treasury Management Strategy approved Finance Council 29 th Feb 2016 / Mid-Year Strategy Report approved Policy Council 1 st December 2016	



REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF FINANCE & IT
TO:	COUNCIL FORUM
ON:	26 JANUARY 2017

SUBJECT: ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDITORS

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To advise the Council of the new arrangements for the appointment of the Council's external auditors for the audit year 2018/19.
- 1.2 If the Council wishes to utilise the national scheme for appointing auditors in the future, which will be operated by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA), it must accept the PSAA's invitation to do so by early March 2017. The paper seeks approval for this and in doing so, approval for the PSAA to appoint the Council's external auditor for the 2018/19 accounts and beyond; this recommendation was endorsed by the Audit & Governance Committee at their meeting on 10th January 2017.

2 Options

- 2.1 Under the Local Audit & Accountability Act 2014 there are three options regarding the arrangements to appoint our own external auditors. These are:
- Opting into a sector led body arrangement that may be established as the appointing person under the Act;
 - Establishing the Council's own independent auditor panel to make a stand-alone appointment; or
 - Join with other authorities to establish a joint auditor panel to make the appointment.
- These options are discussed in the sections below.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Council accepts the invitation from PSAA to 'opt in' to the sector led option for the appointment of external auditors for five financial years commencing 1 April 2018.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Council's external auditors are currently working under a contract originally let by the Audit Commission. The contract was novated to PSAA following the closure of the Audit Commission.
- 4.2 In 2011 the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) consulted with Authorities on options for the future of external audit following the announcement of plans to disband the Audit Commission. The Chair of the Audit Committee responded following

consideration of the proposals at the Committee's meeting in June 2011. The results of the consultation and the timetable for change were presented to the September 2011 meeting.

- 4.3 The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (the Act) received Royal Assent on 30 January 2014. The Act brought to a close the Audit Commission and established transitional arrangements for the appointment of external auditors and the setting of audit fees for all local government and NHS bodies in England. On 5 October 2015 the Secretary of State CLG determined that the transitional arrangements for local government bodies would be extended by one year to also include the audit of the accounts for 2017/18.
- 4.4 The Act also set out the arrangements for the appointment of auditors for subsequent years, with the opportunity for authorities to make their own decisions about how and by whom their auditors are appointed. Regulations made under the Act allow authorities to 'opt in' for their auditor to be appointed by an 'appointing person'.
- 4.5 Secondary legislation was required to give effect to many of the provisions of the Act. In June 2014 the CLG consulted with organisations on the draft regulations affected by the changes (Government response to the Future of Local Audit). This included the specification of the Collective Procurement body for larger authorities and the Audit and Accounts Regulations. The results, 'Future of Local Government - Consultation on secondary legislation: summary of responses and the Government Response', were published in December 2014.
- 4.6 In July 2016 PSAA were specified by the Secretary of State as an 'appointing person' under Regulation 3 of the Local Audit (Appointing Person) Regulations 2015. The appointing person is sometimes referred to as the 'sector led body' and PSAA has wide support across local government. PSAA was originally established to operate the transitional arrangements following the closure of the Audit Commission under powers delegated by the Secretary of State. PSAA is an independent, not-for-profit company limited by guarantee and established by the LGA
- 4.7 PSAA is inviting the Council to opt in, along with all other authorities, so that it can enter into a number of contracts with appropriately qualified audit firms and appoint a suitable firm to be the Council auditor.
- 4.8 The principal benefits from such an approach are as follows:
 - PSAA will ensure the appointment of a suitably qualified and registered auditor and expects to be able to manage the appointments to allow for appropriate groupings and clusters of audits where bodies work together;
 - PSAA will monitor contract delivery and ensure compliance with contractual, audit quality and independence requirements;
 - Any auditor conflicts at individual authorities would be managed by PSAA who would have a number of contracted firms to call upon;
 - It is expected that the large-scale contracts procured through PSAA will bring economies of scale and attract keener prices from the market than a smaller scale competition;
 - The overall procurement costs would be lower than an individual smaller scale local procurement;
 - The overhead costs for managing the contracts will be minimised through a smaller number of large contracts across the sector;
 - There will be no need for the Council to establish alternative appointment processes locally, including the need to set up and manage an 'auditor panel';

- The new regime provides both the perception and reality of independent auditor appointment through a collective approach; and
 - A sustainable market for audit provision in the sector will be easier to ensure for the future.
- 4.9 At present, apart from two district Councils, all the other Council's in Lancashire are planning to use the sector led approach.
- 4.10 The Council's current external auditor is Grant Thornton, this appointment having been made under at a contract let by the Audit Commission. Following closure of the Audit Commission the contract was novated to PSAA, and since this date PSAA has demonstrated its capability in terms of auditor appointment, contract management, and monitoring audit quality. Over recent years authorities have benefited from a reduction in fees in the order of 55% compared with fees in 2012. This has been the result of a combination of factors including new contracts negotiated nationally with the audit firms and savings from closure of the Audit Commission. The Council current external audit fees are £102,839 per annum.
- 4.11 The proposed fees for the subsequent years cannot be known until the procurement process has been completed, as the costs will depend on proposals from the audit firms.
- 4.12 The scope of the audit will still be specified nationally, the National Audit Office (NAO) is responsible for writing the Code of Audit Practice which all firms appointed to carry out the Council's audit must follow. Not all audit firms will be eligible to compete for the work, they will need to demonstrate that they have the required skills and experience and be registered with a Registered Supervising Body approved by the Financial Reporting Council.
- 4.13 Currently, there are only nine providers that are eligible to audit local authorities and other relevant bodies; all of these firms have a national presence. This means that a local procurement exercise, as described immediately below, would seek tenders from these same firms, subject to the need to manage any local independence issues. Local firms could not be invited to bid.

5 Other Options

- 5.1 If the Council does not opt in it will need to establish an independent auditor panel. In order to make a stand-alone appointment the auditor panel would need to be set up by the Council itself. The members of the panel must be wholly or a majority of independent members as defined by the Act. Independent members for this purpose are independent appointees, this excludes current and former elected members (or officers) and their close families and friends. This means that elected members will not have a majority input into assessing bids or in choosing which audit firm to award the contract. The LGA have estimated that recruitment and servicing of the Auditor Panel, running the bidding exercise and negotiating the contract will cost an authority in the order of £15,000 plus on going expenses and allowances.
- 5.2 Alternatively the Act enables the Council to join with other authorities to establish a joint auditor panel. Again this will need to be constituted of wholly or a majority of independent appointees (members). The costs of setting up the panel, running the bidding exercise and negotiating the contract would be shared across a number of authorities. There is greater opportunity for negotiating some economies of scale by being able to offer a larger combined contract value to the firms. However further legal advice would be required on the exact constitution of such a panel having regard to the obligations of each Council

under the Act and the Council would need to liaise with other local authorities to assess the appetite for such an arrangement. The decision making body will be further removed from local input, with potentially no input from elected members where a wholly independent auditor panel is used or possibly only one elected member representing each Council, depending on the constitution agreed with the other bodies involved.

- 5.3 Neither of these options is recommended. Both these options would be more resource-intensive processes to implement and without the bulk buying power of the sector led procurement, would be likely to result in a more costly service. It would also be more difficult to manage quality and independence requirements through a local appointment process.

6 RATIONALE

- 6.1 Regulation 19 of the Local Audit (Appointing Person) Regulations 2015 requires that a decision to opt in must be made by a meeting of the full Council. The Council then needs to formally respond to PSAA's invitation in the form specified by PSAA by early March 2017.
- 6.2 PSAA will commence the formal procurement process after this date. It expects to award contracts in summer 2017 and consult with authorities on the appointment of auditors so that it can make an appointment by the statutory deadline of December 2017.
- 6.3 In 2016 the Council notified the LGA of its potential support for the sector led body approach. PSAA has now formally invited the Council to opt in to the sector led scheme. Details of the invitation are provided at Appendix 1 to this report. In summary the national opt-in scheme provides the following:
- The appointment of a suitably qualified audit firm for each of the five financial years commencing 1 April 2018;
 - Appointing the same auditor to other opted in bodies that are involved in formal collaboration or joint working initiatives to the extent this is possible with other constraints;
 - Managing the procurement process to ensure both quality and price criteria are satisfied. PSAA will seek views from the sector to help inform its detailed procurement strategy;
 - Ensuring suitable independence of the auditors from the bodies they audit and managing any potential conflicts as they arise;
 - Minimising the scheme management costs and returning any surpluses to scheme members;
 - Consulting with authorities on auditor appointments, giving the Council the opportunity to influence which auditor is appointed;
 - Consulting with authorities on the scale of audit fees and ensuring these reflect scale, complexity and audit risk; and
 - Ongoing contract and performance management of the contracts once these have been let.
- 6.4 A sector-wide procurement conducted by PSAA will produce better outcomes and will be less burdensome for the Council than any procurement undertaken locally. More specifically:
- The audit costs are likely to be lower than if the Council sought to appoint locally, as national large-scale contracts are expected to drive keener prices from the audit firms;
 - Without the national appointment, the Council would need to establish a separate independent auditor panel, which could be difficult, costly and time-consuming;

- PSAA can ensure the appointed auditor meets and maintains the required quality standards and can manage any potential conflicts of interest much more easily than the Council; and
- Supporting the sector-led body will help to ensure there is a vibrant public audit market for the benefit of the whole sector and this Council going forward into the medium and long term.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There is a risk irrespective of the route chosen to appoint the external auditor that the current fee levels could increase when the current contracts end in 2018.
- 8.2 Opting-in to a national scheme provides maximum opportunity to ensure fees are as low as possible, whilst ensuring the quality of audit is maintained by entering in to a large scale collective procurement arrangement.
- 8.3 If the national scheme is not used, additional resource will be needed to establish an auditor panel and conduct a procurement exercise. Until a procurement exercise is completed it is not possible to state what, if any, additional budget would be required for audit fees for 2018/19 and beyond.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Section 7 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 requires a relevant Council to appoint a local auditor to audit its accounts for a financial year not later than 31 December in the preceding year. Section 8 governs the procedure for appointment including that the Council must consult and take account of the advice of its auditor panel on the selection and appointment of a local auditor. Section 8 provides that where a relevant Council is a local Council operating executive arrangements, the function of appointing a local auditor to audit its accounts is not the responsibility of an executive of the Council under those arrangements.
- 9.2 Section 12 makes provision for the failure to appoint a local auditor: the Council must immediately inform the Secretary of State, who may direct the Council to appoint the auditor named in the direction or appoint a local auditor on behalf of the Council.
- 9.3 Section 17 gives the Secretary of State the power to make regulations in relation to an 'appointing person' specified by the Secretary of State. This power has been exercised in the Local Audit (Appointing Person) Regulations 2015 (SI 192) and this gives the Secretary of State the ability to enable a Sector Led Body to become the appointing person. In July 2016 the Secretary of State specified PSAA as the appointing person.

10. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

None

11. EQUALITY & HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

None

12. CONSULTATIONS

Audit & Governance Committee, Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive

Contact Officer: Louise Mattinson, Director of Finance &IT (01254 585642)/
Colin Ferguson, Head of Audit & Assurance (01245 585326)

Date: 20 December 2016

Background Papers: None

27 October 2016

Email: appointingperson@psaa.co.uk

Harry Catherall
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
Town Hall
King William Street Blackburn
BB1 7DY

Copied to: Louise Mattinson, Director Of Finance, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
Sian Roxborough, Head of Legal Services Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

Dear Mr Catherall

Invitation to opt into the national scheme for auditor appointments

As you know the external auditor for the audit of the accounts for 2018/19 has to be appointed before the end of 2017. That may seem a long way away, but as there is now a choice about how to make that appointment, a decision on your authority's approach will be needed soon.

We are pleased that the Secretary of State has expressed his confidence in us by giving us the role of appointing local auditors under a national scheme. This is one choice open to your authority. We issued a prospectus about the scheme in July 2016, available to download on the [appointing person](#) page of our website, with other information you may find helpful.

The timetable we have outlined for appointing auditors under the scheme means we now need to issue a formal invitation to opt into these arrangements. The covering email provides the formal invitation, along with a form of acceptance of our invitation for you to use if your authority decides to join the national scheme. We believe the case for doing so is compelling. To help with your decision we have prepared the additional information attached to this letter.

I need to highlight two things:

- we need to receive your formal acceptance of this invitation by 9 March 2017; and
- the relevant regulations require that, except for a body that is a corporation sole (a police and crime commissioner), the decision to accept the invitation and to opt in needs to be made by the members of the authority meeting as a whole. We appreciate this will need to be built into your decision making timetable.

If you have any other questions not covered by our information, do not hesitate to contact us by email at appointingperson@psaa.co.uk.

Yours sincerely



Jon Hayes, Chief Officer

Appointing an external auditor

Information on the national scheme

Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA)

We are a not-for-profit company established by the Local Government Association (LGA). We administer the current audit contracts, let by the Audit Commission before it closed.

We have the support of the LGA, which has worked to secure the option for principal local government and police bodies to appoint auditors through a dedicated sector-led national procurement body. We have established an advisory panel, drawn from representative groups of local government and police bodies, to give access to your views on the design and operation of the scheme.

The national scheme for appointing local auditors

We have been specified by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government as the appointing person for principal local government bodies. This means that we will make auditor appointments to principal local government bodies that choose to opt into the national appointment arrangements we will operate for audits of the accounts from 2018/19. These arrangements are sometimes described as the 'sector-led body' option, and our thinking for this scheme was set out in a prospectus circulated to you in July. The prospectus is available on the [appointing person](#) page of our website.

We will appoint an auditor for all opted-in authorities for each of the five financial years beginning from 1 April 2018, unless the Secretary of State chooses to terminate our role as the appointing person beforehand. He or she may only do so after first consulting opted-in authorities and the LGA.

What the appointing person scheme will offer

We are committed to making sure the national scheme will be an excellent option for auditor appointments for you.

We intend to run the scheme in a way that will save time and resources for local government bodies. We think that a collective procurement, which we will carry out on behalf of all opted-in authorities, will enable us to secure the best prices, keeping the cost of audit as low as possible for the bodies who choose to opt in, without compromising on audit quality.

Our current role means we have a unique experience and understanding of auditor procurement and the local public audit market.

Using the scheme will avoid the need for you to:

- establish an audit panel with independent members;
- manage your own auditor procurement and cover its costs;
- monitor the independence of your appointed auditor for the duration of the appointment;
- deal with the replacement of any auditor if required; and
- manage the contract with your auditor.

Our scheme will endeavour to appoint the same auditors to other opted-in bodies that are involved in formal collaboration or joint working initiatives, if you consider that a common auditor will enhance efficiency and value for money.

We will also try to be flexible about changing your auditor during the five-year appointing period if there is good reason, for example where new joint working arrangements are put in place.

Securing a high level of acceptances to the opt-in invitation will provide the best opportunity for us to achieve the most competitive prices from audit firms. The LGA has previously sought expressions of interest in the appointing person arrangements, and received positive responses from over 270 relevant authorities. We ultimately hope to achieve participation from the vast majority of eligible authorities.

High quality audits

The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 provides that firms must be registered as local public auditors with one of the chartered accountancy institutes acting in the capacity of a Recognised Supervisory Body (RSB). The quality of registered firms' work will be subject to scrutiny by both the RSB and the Financial Reporting Council (FRC), under arrangements set out in the Act.

We will:

- only contract with audit firms that have a proven track record in undertaking public audit work;
- include obligations in relation to maintaining and continuously improving quality in our contract terms and in the quality criteria in our tender evaluation;
- ensure that firms maintain the appropriate registration and will liaise closely with RSBs and the FRC to ensure that any quality concerns are detected at an early stage; and
- take a close interest in your feedback and in the rigour and effectiveness of firms' own quality assurance arrangements.

We will also liaise with the National Audit Office to help ensure that guidance to auditors is updated as necessary.

Procurement strategy

In developing our procurement strategy for the contracts with audit firms, we will have input from the advisory panel we have established. The panel will assist PSAA in developing arrangements for the national scheme, provide feedback to us on proposals as they develop, and helping us maintain effective channels of communication. We think it is particularly important to understand your preferences and priorities, to ensure we develop a strategy that reflects your needs within the constraints set out in legislation and in professional requirements.

In order to secure the best prices we are minded to let audit contracts:

- for 5 years;
- in 2 large contract areas nationally, with 3 or 4 contract lots per area, depending on the number of bodies that opt in; and
- to a number of firms in each contract area to help us manage independence issues.

The value of each contract will depend on the prices bid, with the firms offering the best value being awarded larger amounts of work. By having contracts with a number of firms, we will be able to manage issues of independence and avoid dominance of the market by one or two firms. Limiting the national volume of work available to any one firm will encourage competition and ensure the plurality of provision.

Auditor appointments and independence

Auditors must be independent of the bodies they audit, to enable them to carry out their work with objectivity and credibility, and in a way that commands public confidence.

We plan to take great care to ensure that every auditor appointment passes this test. We will also monitor significant proposals for auditors to carry out consultancy or other non-audit work, to protect the independence of auditor appointments.

We will consult you on the appointment of your auditor, most likely from September 2017. To make the most effective allocation of appointments, it will help us to know about:

- any potential constraints on the appointment of your auditor because of a lack of independence, for example as a result of consultancy work awarded to a particular firm;
- any joint working or collaboration arrangements that you think should influence the appointment; and
- other local factors you think are relevant to making the appointment.

We will ask you for this information after you have opted in.

Auditor appointments for the audit of the accounts of the 2018/19 financial year must be made by 31 December 2017.

Fee scales

We will ensure that fee levels are carefully managed by securing competitive prices from firms and by minimising our own costs. Any surplus funds will be returned to scheme members under our articles of association and our memorandum of understanding with the Department for Communities and Local Government and the LGA.

Our costs for setting up and managing the scheme will need to be covered by audit fees. We expect our annual operating costs will be lower than our current costs because we expect to employ a smaller team to manage the scheme. We are intending to fund an element of the costs of establishing the scheme, including the costs of procuring audit contracts, from local government's share of our current deferred income. We think this is appropriate because the new scheme will be available to all relevant principal local government bodies.

PSAA will pool scheme costs and charge fees to audited bodies in accordance with a fair scale of fees which has regard to size, complexity and audit risk, most likely as evidenced by audit fees for 2016/17. Pooling means that everyone in the scheme will benefit from the most competitive prices. Fees will reflect the number of scheme participants – the greater the level of participation, the better the value represented by our scale fees.

Scale fees will be determined by the prices achieved in the auditor procurement that PSAA will need to undertake during the early part of 2017. Contracts are likely to be awarded at the end of June 2017, and at this point the overall cost and therefore the level of fees required will be clear. We expect to consult on the proposed scale of fees in autumn 2017 and to publish the fees applicable for 2018/19 in March 2018.

Opting in

The closing date for opting in is 9 March 2017. We have allowed more than the minimum eight week notice period required, because the formal approval process for most eligible bodies, except police and crime commissioners, is a decision made by the members of an authority meeting as a whole.

We will confirm receipt of all opt-in notices. A full list of authorities who opt in will be published on our website. Once we have received an opt-in notice, we will write to you to request information on any joint working arrangements relevant to your auditor appointment, and any potential independence matters that would prevent us appointing a particular firm.

If you decide not to accept the invitation to opt in by the closing date, you may subsequently make a request to opt in, but only after 1 April 2018. The earliest an auditor appointment can be made for authorities that opt in after the closing date is therefore for the audit of the accounts for 2019/20. We are required to consider such requests, and agree to them unless there are reasonable grounds for their refusal.

Timetable

In summary, we expect the timetable for the new arrangements to be:

- Invitation to opt in issued 27 October 2016
- Closing date for receipt of notices to opt in 9 March 2017
- Contract notice published 20 February 2017
- Award audit contracts By end of June 2017
- Consult on and make auditor appointments By end of December 2017
- Consult on and publish scale fees By end of March 2018

Enquiries

We publish frequently asked questions on our [website](#). We are keen to receive feedback from local bodies on our plans. Please email your feedback or questions to: appointingperson@psaa.co.uk.

If you would like to discuss a particular issue with us, please send an email to the above address, and we will make arrangements either to telephone or meet you.



REPORT TO:	COUNCIL FORUM
FROM:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE
ON:	THURSDAY, 26TH JANUARY 2017

REPORT TITLE: Electoral Review 2016-17 Warding proposals.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To agree a submission for Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) on Warding arrangements.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

This report contains a proposal on Warding for the Borough which Council is invited to endorse. It is recommended that Council:

- Agree the Warding proposals detailed in Appendix A as the Council submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission.
- Subject to agreeing the recommendations in Appendix A, authorise the Chief Executive to formally submit the proposal on Council Warding arrangements from May 2018 to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England for their inclusion as early as possible in the next round of consultation.

3. COUNCIL 2017 WARDING PROPOSAL

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council currently has 64 elected Members in 23 wards. Members will be aware that following the agreement at Council on 6th October 2016 the Boundary Commission formally confirmed the size of Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council to be 51 Councillors for 17 Wards by 2018 to ensure appropriate levels of Governance, Scrutiny and Community Leadership which also allows for the Authority to continue to elect its Members by thirds.

Using the Boundary Commissions guidance to develop a new Warding proposal for the Borough, several factors were taken into consideration, primarily the statutory criteria of;

- **Delivering electoral equality for local voters** – this means ensuring that each councillor represents roughly the same number of voters so that the value of your vote is the same regardless of where you live in the local authority area.
- **Interests and identities of local communities** – this means establishing electoral arrangements which, as far as possible, avoid splitting local ties and where boundaries are easily identifiable.

- **Effective and convenient local government** – this means ensuring that the wards can be represented effectively by their elected representative(s) and that the new electoral arrangements as a whole, including both the council size decision and warding arrangements, allow the local authority to conduct its business effectively.

In the spirit of openness, transparency and inclusivity there have been several joint meetings with all of the political Group Leaders and an ongoing invitation outside of these meetings for each political Group to submit any minor revisions to a working draft. The end product being the draft Council proposal attached to this report. (Appendix A).

To give Members some insight into the process followed, using the advice and guidance available and subsequent comment from the Commission a set of proposals was worked up for cross party consideration: This generated a couple of suggestions that were worked up to see if they were feasible. Sadly none of those proposals worked within the guidance we had been given. Following these discussions we asked the Commission to consider an initial set of first draft proposals worked up on 17 Wards for Blackburn with Darwen, and for them to give a view in principle on the draft warding arrangements. We were advised that the proposals looked to be within acceptable tolerances and would provide a good first draft for a wider audience to consider.

Having been given a view in principle from the Commission, dialogue with Leaders and Groups has remained open throughout this process and further suggested minor revisions that are within guidelines have been included in the attached draft. Therefore we seek agreement from Council to the draft warding proposal attached as Appendix A.

To emphasise the decision making process, it should be made clear that the draft proposal (Appendix A) does not automatically become the new arrangements, even if agreed by Council: The final decision is that of the Commission and not of the Council – hence it is important for as wide a range of stakeholders as possible to engage with the Commission throughout the consultation.

Subject to Council agreement of Appendix A, the Commission would be advised of the decision reached and asked to place what then becomes the Councils proposal on their website for public consideration, comment and alternative proposal(s).

4. BACKGROUND

It should be noted that the Council cannot take its own decisions on size or warding arrangements and must submit its proposals to the LGBCE at every stage. The LGBCE will consider and determine the proposals based on its own assessment of relevant factors.

Timetable

Draft Council Size submission deadline	17 th October 2016	Done
Boundary Commission decision on Council size	15 th November 2016	Done
Consultation on warding	22 nd November 2016 – 30 th January 2017	Ongoing

Draft recommendations on warding arrangements	11 th April 2017	
Consultation on draft recommendations	11 th April – 19 th June 2017	
Final recommendations published	5 th September 2017	
Order Laid	October 2017	
Implementation*	Elections in 2018*	

Members have been provided with a copy of the full Review timetable. Whilst the Council has engaged with all parties to work on one submission, it should be noted that this does not exclude individuals or political groups from putting forward their own ideas. At every stage the LGBCE will consult widely seeking the views of a range of stakeholders.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Council are asked to note the direction of travel from both this Warding proposal and the background papers submitted to and agreed by Council Forum in October 2016, acknowledging that a detailed review will be undertaken over the next 12 months to redesign a political structure that will be fit for purpose and fit for future to best serve the people of Blackburn with Darwen.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Effectively supporting fewer yet larger Wards will subject to the detailed review outlined in “Policy implications” to deliver strong effective local government.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

1. The LGBCE is required to comply with certain rules when conducting a Review. Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, section 56 requires the LGBCE to conduct a Review of principal local authorities from time to time and recommend whether a change should be made to the “electoral arrangements” meaning:

- the total number of Members to be elected to the Council (‘Council size’);
- the number and boundaries of electoral areas for the purposes of the election of Councillors;
- the number of councillors to be returned by any electoral area (ward) in that area
- the name of any electoral area.

In making recommendations, under Schedule 2 of the Act the LGBCE must have regard to:

- the need to secure equality of representation;
- the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- the need to secure effective and convenient local government.

2. Any resolutions regarding the scheme of elections must be in accordance with the Part 2 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

3. The review of Members’ allowances will need to be undertaken by the Independent

Remuneration Panel and in accordance with the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

A small team of Officers continues to be convened when required, to support the various stages and requirements of the Review and its consultations, ensuring compliance with the timetable outlined by the Local Government Boundary Commission England.

9. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

As an integral element to the process, Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken at various stages of the Review and its consultations.

10. CONSULTATIONS

21st July 2016 the Commission consulted with all Members of the Council on the Review process. From 22nd November – 30th January 2017 the Commission are holding a public consultation on warding arrangements, following which there will be a further public consultation on new draft warding recommendations from 11th April – 19th June 2017. A final decision by the Commission and recommendation to Government will be made on 5th September 2017, following which an Order will be Laid before Parliament in October 2017 for implementation in the all-out elections of May 2018.

Appendix A: ([Ctrl+Click to follow link](#)): This appendix, following ongoing dialogue and minor revisions is the draft Council submission for Members approval.

A Link to each of the 17 Ward maps is below – please paste it into your browser:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B2ZFtqvmkoZXRnJPUUViaUdqd3c>

Contact Officer:	Ben Aspinall Lead Review Officer Ben.aspinall@blackburn.gov.uk	01254 585191
Date:	13 th January 2017	
Background Papers:	Report to Council Forum October 2016.	

REPORT OF THE POLICY AND CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

LEAD CHIEF OFFICER:

Denise Park

Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee;

Since the last meeting of Council, there have been two Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings and two Call In Committee meetings. The Policy and Corporate Resources meetings have focused on understand the changes the Council faces as budgets continue to decrease and the impact on the Council as a whole.

Two key areas the Committee focussed on have been the workforce review and ensuring saving previously identified are delivered, this is a topic the Committee will be keeping under review as more information comes to light.

Call In

The Virtual Call In Committee has convened to hear two Call Ins since the last meeting of Council. The first on the 25th October 2016 relating to the Executive Member decision taken on the 15th September 2016 'Implementation of a Development Investment Fund and approval to Recycle Capital Receipt Income', the second was held on the 21st December 2016 regarding the Executive Member decision taken on the 8th December 2016 'Proposed Traffic Regulation Order for Railway Road and Atlas Road, Darwen'. The outcome of the named vote for both of these meetings was to accept the decision of the Executive Members and both decisions were progressed.

Regeneration and Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee;

The Committee has continued its work, reviewing in detail the Boroughs night time economy. Members have also undertaken a review with the Executive Member of potential Capital project schemes currently being considered in the Borough to continue to drive growth.

Members also received an update on the Council's parking offers in the Borough and changes since it was last presented to the Committee And Members received a presentation from Executive Member for Neighbourhoods Housing and Customer Services on a number of recommendations made by the Committee on its work into Selective Landlord Licensing and an update on the progress of scheme.

Health and Adults Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee has nearly completed its chosen work programme for the municipal year, with only one standing meeting remaining (13th March). At their meeting on the 17th October 2016, the Committee received an overview

of Homecare costs, sustainability of care homes, market provision and the 2016/17 Homecare retender. Members will be invited to take part in the retendering consultation as the process progresses to allow for pre-decision scrutiny.

Since the last Council meeting, Members have undertaken one of three planned site visits to Care centres (Spring Bank Court, Hopwood Court and Kingsway) to see first-hand the provisions in place for Blackburn with Darwen residents.

The Committee received an update on how Adult Services are trying to meet the demand for Care, which in the main, would be increasing collaborative partnership working and developing a community asset based approach to service delivery. A task and finish group explored this topic in detail and Members agreed that they will continue to work with the Executive Member over the coming months as the Your Call agenda progresses.

At the meeting on the 23rd January, the Director of Public Health returned to provide Members with an update on his risks and priorities for the year. Members also considered work of external partners such as Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen and the impact of winter pressures on A&E provision in the Borough.

Children & Young People's OSC

Since the last meeting of Council, the Committee has completed a number of items on its work programme for this year. At its October meeting, Members reviewed mental health services for young people with a focus on substance misuse and self-harm. They also received a presentation on the integrated youth offer for the Borough.

A task and finish group attended a site visit at St Thomas' Pupil Referral Unit Darwen to witness first-hand the mental health training schemes currently being piloted in the in the education system. Members will receive updates on this training as the scheme is rolled out to other schools.

In November the Executive Member for Children's Services gave Members an overview of the rising demand for Children's Social Care and the measures the department will be implementing to meet the demand whilst continuing to deliver efficiency savings. The Committee also agreed a series of recommendations on their work programme to date which were forwarded to their respective Executive Members.

The Committee were given a presentation on sSocial Educational Needs and Disabilities at their January 16th 2017 meeting. The presentation outlined the key changes to legislation and how the department was meeting increased demand and preparing for OFSTED inspection.

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR MOHAMMED KHAN

Date: 26th January 2017
Item 14.1

LANCASHIRE COMBINED AUTHORITY

Background

Members will be aware that Lancashire has been operating in shadow from since July 2016 and continue to meet monthly.

The shadow Lancashire Combined Authority (LCA) has five core policy themes – Skilled Lancashire; Better Homes for Lancashire; Connected Lancashire; Prosperous Lancashire and Public Services Working for Lancashire.

Progress

The shadow LCA is already having a positive impact for Lancashire. The Area Based Review of Further Education provision in Lancashire now has political oversight from the Combined Authority, health partners are recognising the influential role the Combined Authority will have in delivering the Lancashire and South Cumbria Sustainability and Transformation Plan and we have recently been accepted onto the Government's One Public Estate programme and awarded £340k which provides capacity funding for two years and will finance feasibility studies on a number of projects across the county. Blackburn with Darwen are the accountable body for One Public Estate.

Each of the five core policy themes has a political lead with a work programme under development. I have been appointed as the political lead for Public Services. The Public Services work programme includes the establishment of a Lancashire Public Service Board with representation from public sector organisations, health, blue light services and government departments. I will also Chair an Executive group which will provide political strategic direction and oversight to the work programme for the Public Service Board. The first meeting of the Executive will be held at the end of January with the first meeting of the Public Service Board in early February.

The Lancashire Plan and Devolution

The shadow LCA is developing a Lancashire Plan which will set out a vision for Lancashire based on the five core themes. Each of these themes will be underpinned by an action plan with clear timescales for delivery and political leads will oversee direction and delivery.

Over recent months Leaders have been developing a proposal for devolution to the Lancashire Combined Authority, which could enable greater control, power and influence over a range of programmes and funding delivered in Lancashire. These include a Growth and Productivity Fund worth £900m, devolved funding for strategic transport and development; influence and/or control over employment and skills programmes and delivery; housing funding; growth funding and aligning investment activity.

Next Steps

In order to establish the Combined Authority an Order must be laid before Parliament. We expect this to be agreed shortly and Leaders will be asked to write to the Secretary of State to consent to the Order being laid. We anticipate that the Lancashire Combined Authority will be formally established from April 2017. However, there is some frustration from Lancashire Leaders on the slow progress from Government, and this is also being reflected nationally. We will continue to lobby ministers and a further report on progress will be brought to the next Council meeting.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY COHESION

Supporting Community Cohesion is a key priority for this Council, and part of that is our commitment to tackling hate crime. Item 14.1

Since this Council agreed a motion in July, we have played a key role in efforts to tackle hatred in our borough. In October, Blackburn with Darwen Council supported Hate Crime Awareness Week. Events took place in and around Blackburn with Darwen to raise awareness of how hate crime affects people, to support people who are victims of hate crime and the different forms it can take. We have promoted formal and informal channels for people who may have been victims of hate crime to be able to talk to someone and report how they have felt.

Blackburn with Darwen was also one of four areas across Lancashire to host a roadshow alongside the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Constabulary and partners during the week. It was heartening to see so many people take part in such events. On the day several hundred people who were in the Town Centre signed a pledge. The event was a great success in raising awareness.

We have also supported partners to deliver hate crime training and awareness and secured funding to help with this agenda. Two examples of forthcoming initiatives include innovative work with The Sophie Lancaster Foundation and with The Anne Frank Trust.

However we do acknowledge there is also more that we as a Council and indeed everyone else can do. We will continue to look at ways in which we can facilitate, enable and support organisations and individuals to make a difference in supporting community cohesion.

Everyone has a role to play to ensure Blackburn with Darwen is free from hatred in all its form and remains a great place for people of all faiths and backgrounds to continue to want to live, work and visit.

In going to print with this update Members will be aware that we are holding a service in the Council Chamber on 24th January for Holocaust Memorial Day. I urge you to attend and support this service if at all possible and I hope to be able to report back positively in my report at the Council Forum.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRANSFORMATION UPDATE

Blackburn with Darwen Council continues to play a key role in efforts to transform the health and care system both locally and across Lancashire and South Cumbria.

Members may be aware that the Lancashire and South Cumbria Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP) was published in November 2016.

The plan sets out why change needs to happen. It says residents in Blackburn with Darwen and other areas have poor health and outlines if things stay the same there will be a gap of more than £570m between the demand for services and the money available. The Lancashire and South Cumbria Change Programme will soon be going out talking to residents to raise awareness of the STP and how they can get involved.

As members will also be aware, a programme of work to transform health and care in Pennine Lancashire has been progressing. The Together a Healthier Future programme, which is aligned to and feeds into the STP, is coming to the end of the first phase of talking to residents and stakeholders about what they think a new health and care system could look like.

Several public engagement events have been held as well as engagement through the media and social media.

This engagement has helped shape the proposals currently being developed. ^{Item 14.1} We expect a credible plan setting out how health and care will be transformed to be published soon. Residents, councillors and others will have many opportunities to get involved and give their views.

This is a vitally important piece of work. Our budget is under huge strain because of government cuts and more and more people are needing adult social care services. We need plans that help tackle that demand as well as making our residents healthier. This is the process which will hopefully produce those plans. However, given the significant funding pressure, it may prove impossible to close the £570m gap and therefore members are encouraged to lobby the Government when possible.

It is important that the Council continues to play a part in this process to influence and shape the future of health and social care, so that we can have confidence that the proposals are right for our communities.

Due to the importance of both programmes and of councillors being actively involved in the process, I have asked officers to organise a briefing session and I would urge all members to attend.

Finally, in what is great news for Blackburn with Darwen I am delighted East Lancashire Hospitals Trust (ELHT) and Lancashire Care Foundation Trust (LCFT) have both been rated Good by the Care Quality Commission in recent inspections.

Item 14.1

ADULT SOCIAL CARE

SOCIAL CARE OUTCOME MEASURES, CARE SECTOR QUALITY & STAFF TURNOVER

The Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (Ascof) captures information on outcomes in adult social care. Of the 19 Ascof measures captured in 2015/16, 13 improved compared with 2014/15. Of particular note were the results in the Ascof measures drawn from the adult social care user survey. The results of 7 user outcome measures were reported in Ascof and in all 7 the BwD results were a) higher than in 2014/15, when they were already excellent; and b) were the highest of all the NW authorities.

Another aspect of the department's work worthy of comment is quality in care homes. The department has its own quality assurance scheme (QAS), which monitors quality of care and gives 'enhanced' QAS status to homes meeting particularly high standards. Five additional homes achieved the enhanced QAS status in the past year. In addition to our own QAS scheme, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) monitors the standard of care in homes from a statutory angle. BwD has the highest proportion of homes in the NW rated as 'good' by the CQC, and was – at the most recent count – the only area in the NW with no homes which were 'CQC non-compliant'.

Finally, re staff turnover, in 2015/16 the Blackburn with Darwen care sector – across all types of provision, residential and domiciliary – had a turnover of just 11.3%. This was the lowest rate in the NW, and compared with a NW average of 24.2% and England average of 25.7%.

APPLE HOUSE GROUND BREAKING CEREMONY

A ground breaking ceremony took place at Apple Street in Blackburn on 30th November to mark the start of building work at a new housing scheme for people aged over 16 with autism, learning disabilities and associated challenges. Cllr Mohammed Khan opened the event and the ground breaking ceremony was completed by Michael Turner, a member of the Blackburn with Darwen Learning Disability Partnership Board.

The 'Apple House' supported tenancy scheme will provide self-contained apartments for 12 people and will be managed by housing providers Homelife and Inclusion Housing. The scheme was developed through consultation with service users, families and carers and will provide 24-hour background support and assistive technology, as well as individualised packages of care. Children and young people with severe/profound autism and challenging behaviour have historically had to leave their family home and community to access out of the borough placements which can support their significant levels of need. This new scheme will bridge the gap in provision and allow people to remain in their local community. The scheme is due to be completed in summer 2017.

ADULT LEARNING DISABILITY TEAM RELOCATION

The Adult Learning Disability Social Work Team have moved from the Tower Block in Blackburn to Darwen Resource Centre in Darwen. The team is now co-located with the Health Service Learning Disability Team who were previously based at Bridge House in Blackburn. This move will help to improve joint working between the teams as practitioners from Social Work, Community Nursing, Psychology and Speech and Language Therapy are based together within the same office. This co-location is already improving communication and relationships between health and social care colleagues and represents a significant step towards providing a fully integrated learning disability service to our residents.

HEALTH

SUICIDE PREVENTION STRATEGY

After several years of sustained work between Blackburn with Darwen Council and partners to prioritise mental health and wellbeing, the local Suicide Prevention Strategy was launched in September, to coincide with World Suicide Prevention Day. While there are now an average of 15 deaths by suicide each year locally, compared to over 18 per year in the period 2009-12, any death by suicide is a tragedy and there is more we can and must do, particularly in men who account for 75% of suicides.

The strategy encourages more joined-up working and sharing of resources and expertise to prevent suicides, and provide better support for those who have been bereaved or affected by suicide. Early intervention tools are being developed to help identify early, people at risk of suicide and self-harm and implement programmes to improve mental health and wellbeing from an early age and further promote the nationally-recognised 'five ways to wellbeing' - be active, take notice, keep learning, connect, give.

In November the Centre for Mental Health issued national evidence based guidance on 'What makes a good Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Mental Health or Dementia'. In developing its recommendations, Blackburn with Darwen's Emotional Health and Wellbeing ISNA for Children and Young People is cited as a best practice example of a local area using needs assessment to drive change and improvement.

STOP SMOKING

Locally, smoking remains the single biggest cause of preventable death, disability and health inequalities. However, Tobacco Control profiles recently released by Public Health England show that in Blackburn with Darwen during 2015/16, the rate of people setting a quit date per 100,000 smokers was 11th highest in the country and that the rate of successful quitters confirmed by testing for carbon monoxide levels was the 19th highest in the country.

While smoking rates in adults remains significantly above the national average, the rate in 15 year olds, at 8%, is slightly lower than the national average. However, the percentage of young people who have ever used e-cigarettes is the second highest in the country at 32%, compared with 18% nationally.

MAKING EVERY ADULT MATTER (MEAM)

The Blackburn with Darwen MEAM programme aims to work with some of the most chaotic adults who experience a combination of issues across homelessness, mental health, substance misuse and offending, often trapped in the revolving door of statutory and voluntary services. The programme has recently been evaluated to identify how MEAM has improved the lives of the 28 men and women it worked with between June 2014 and December 2015 and reduced demand for services.

The evaluation found significant strengths in the person-centred outreach work and the integration of professional staff and volunteers. Furthermore, the programme achieved significant impacts on services, with total savings through reduced demand on health, housing and criminal justice estimated at £170,000 per annum.

NUMBERS OF CHILDREN IN CARE & CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE INFORMATION

There has been a general rise in demand across Children's Services as a whole from Early Help (there are now over 400 CAFs), right through to the numbers of children in care. This is having a significant impact on the caseloads held by social workers, which are currently too high, particularly in the Assessment and Safeguarding Teams. We have also seen a rise in the number of teenagers open to the department. This group tends to have more complex issues and while we have our outstanding and nationally recognised Adolescent Support Unit, children entering care from this group are much more likely to go into more expensive agency placements and this is putting a pressure on commissioned placement budgets.

As at 13th January there are 366 children in care, 307 children subject to Child Protection Plans and 645 children with Child in Need plans. The total number of open children's social care cases has risen to 1840, up from 1778 in October & 1686 in July.

27 children have been adopted since April 2016, and 19 children are placed in adoptive placements.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION PEER REVIEW

The Local Government Association (LGA) have completed a peer review of Children's Services (5th – 8th December 2016). The peer review was in the form of a Care Practice Diagnostic (CPD), designed to assist councils in further strengthening their work with and support to children and young people in care and providing an independent view about the quality of care practice on the ground.

The review team noted strengths in our commitment to children at all levels and across partners, our can-do culture, visible leadership and good engagement with children and young people. They also made a number of suggestions of areas for us to consider for improvement, most of which focused around the increased demand and our ability to meet that demand with the current resources. There are also some issues for the partnership to consider, such as more joint commissioning around health, and a reconsideration of the work taken by the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to ensure that single agency work is not inadvertently being handed over to the MASH.

FESTIVE FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

In December, foster carers and staff in the Let's Foster team set up a gift wrapping production line in the Mall to aid busy shoppers. Their efforts raised a total of £291 towards a Christmas party at Blackburn Rugby Club for children in foster care. Gift tags designed by three children in foster care were on sale and the children, aged 3, 8 and 13 all received Mall vouchers for their winning designs.

There was further support for children in the borough with many donations of gifts and toys for children in need, which were kindly donated by local businesses, church and community groups, staff and residents. These presents provided a boost for families who otherwise would struggle to provide gifts.

Children's Services staff were on hand throughout the festive period to support children and families.

REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY (RAA) DEVELOPMENTS

It is proposed that the Adoption Service for the Council becomes part of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) from Autumn 2017 alongside five other Local Authorities and two Voluntary Adoption Agencies. Department for Education grant funding has been in place since Autumn 2015 to support the scoping out of this venture, however, funding has not been at the level needed to sustain progress between April and October 2016 to keep within the initial timeframe.

Going forward, the plan is to continue with the development of the RAA with full implementation in Autumn 2017. The proposal is a hub and spoke model with the hub based in Bolton. The proposed legal model is a local authority hosted model with Bolton Council as host authority. This plan received the backing of the Council's Executive Board in December 2016.

YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE UPDATES

The Youth Justice Service has worked closely with the Court Service and a group of young people to develop a unique "Problem Solving Court". The project has won the National Children and Young People Annual Award for Youth Justice and is recognised as innovative practice by the Youth Justice Board and some criminal research agencies. A number of partner agencies are now involved and all have recorded more positive outcomes.

Earlier this year, a consultation took place to determine the future of Youth Court provision for the Pan Lancashire area. There was tremendous support for retaining the Blackburn Youth Court and a strong submission was made. In mid-December a decision was made that the Youth Court in Blackburn will continue to operate.

OFSTED INSPECTIONS UPDATE

Little Harwood Children's Centre has maintained an overall 'good' Ofsted inspection judgement with an 'outstanding' rating for personal development, behaviour and welfare. The Inspector commented on the commitment of staff to the continuous improvement of the quality of learning experiences for children and remarked that the views of parents and children are embedded in evaluations.

Apple Trees short breaks residential home is delighted to retain an 'outstanding' judgement. The Inspector concluded that enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff provide 'exceptional day to day experiences' for children and young people with disabilities and complex needs. Feedback from parents highlighted what Apple Trees means to them. One parent said '*Staff are part of the extended family. They treat my child like their own. I can't describe the difference that this service has made to my child and the family as a whole. This place is just amazing; a brilliant service.*'

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS - GETTING TO GOOD SEMINAR

The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service was invited by Ofsted to host a Getting to Good seminar on 'effective IRO service provision'. The event was jointly delivered with Bolton Council and allowed the service to showcase developments to peers on improving the quality of participation by children and young people in their Looked After Reviews.

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION WEEK

Leading up to Child Sexual Exploitation week at the beginning of November, the Engage team was involved in a range of activities highlighting child sexual exploitation across the borough. The theme this year was 'hard to reach young people, including those with complex needs and from Black and Minority Ethnic communities. With that in mind a document specifically about the exploitation of Asian girls and young women was produced.

Item 14.3

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT

Item 14.4

COUNCILLOR JIM SMITH

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR - MARTIN EDEN
DATE: 26 JANUARY 2017**

FIREWORKS ENFORCEMENT

Trading standards staff worked closely with the Police, Fire Service and colleagues in Community Safety to play their part in ensuring that bonfire night stayed as safe and controlled as possible. In the run-up to bonfire night, officers vetted every application for a fireworks licence which was received, to make sure that licences were only issued to fit and proper persons. An inspection programme saw officers checking fireworks storage at retailers, and an under-age sales test purchasing operation checked 10 premises, none of whom sold. Officers also acted on unlicensed sales through Facebook and prevented unauthorised supply. Two officers were on duty on the night itself but were not called on to take enforcement action.

PROSECUTIONS

Public Protection tries hard to deal informally with most breaches of legislation informally, but sometimes court action is unavoidable. Three Public Protection prosecutions have been heard in the period October to December 2016. The first related to noise nuisance caused by cockerels crowing, and resulted in a total penalty of £1484. The second related to dumped waste, and resulted in a total penalty of £407. The third related to illicit tobacco, and a guilty plea has been entered; sentencing is expected to take place in January or February 2017.

WASTE

The introduction of alternate weekly collections in October has progressed satisfactorily, with reductions in tonnages seen on October, although tonnages rose to pre-October levels in November for burgundy bin waste. We have though seen a rise in recycling tonnages in November.

Promoting the introduction of the Garden Waste Collection scheme has commenced, with all households receiving notification in December, prior to the scheme commencing in March. In December alone, nearly 1,000 customers have joined the scheme, benefiting from a reduced rate of £20 to join the scheme.

Item 14.4

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR LEISURE, CULTURE AND YOUNG PEOPLE

COUNCILLOR DAMIAN TALBOT

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: MARTIN EDEN
DATE: 26 JANUARY 2016**

MUSEUM AND ARTS

India's Gateway; Gujarat, Mumbai & Britain is a temporary exhibition with family friendly activities that traces the history of Gujarat and Mumbai as age-old centres of trade and migration, focusing on their remarkable links with Britain. Featuring photographs by Tim Smith, the exhibition weaves history together with words and images to explore the lives and experiences of Gujarati communities today.

The exhibition opens on Saturday 18 February with free activities to experience, including open drumming performance and workshop, food tasting, henna and crafts. The event is from 1.00pm – 3.30pm and all are welcome. The exhibition has been externally funded through Arts Council England. University Centre at Blackburn College is one of the partners we are working with on the development and delivery of the displays and events programme, as well as Action Factory and local artists.

School Visits to Blackburn museum and Art Gallery are increasing with 870 children visiting from 20 schools in the last quarter. This represents 28 visits bringing 35 classes. 23 out of 28 visits were by Blackburn schools but we have attracted schools from as far away as Blackpool.

Wensley Fold, St Silas and Sacred Heart primary schools also held a celebration event here and we had outreach visits resulting in work with a further 460 children. Our Saturday 'Get Crafty' workshops have been attended by 400 children plus their parents. Student filmmakers from the University and Art students from the College have also used the museum's galleries as a resource for their coursework.

Found in Blackburn is an exciting exploration into some of the Town's empty buildings and hidden treasures, alongside the memories of the people who used to inhabit these spaces. The project funded by Heritage Lottery Fund, will take place across the town through January and March and will involve artists, photographers and film-makers leading to a final exhibition starting on 11th March 2017. Highlights will include an artist in residence in the market painting and sculpting the traders and shoppers, a radio show being made with an artist with Radio Lancashire and opportunities for the community to take part by getting their own cameras from Camera Obscura (community darkroom) which will be developed as part of the exhibition.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE

Item 14.5

Takeover challenge took place on Thursday 15th December. The event consisted of a workshop run by Lancashire MIND in partnership with YPS & SLYNCS and focused on mental health and well-being for young people. The event allowed young people to discuss issues around mental health and offer proposals to key decision makers around the support young people feel they should receive. Two workshops helped raise young people's awareness of emotional health and well-being. The event also established pledges to demonstrate commitment to the agenda from all involved and identified potential solutions around how to support young people who may suffer from mental health conditions. The event was a fantastic opportunity for young people from across BwD to help shape and design services they receive. Preparations for the youth elections are under way.

All schools, colleges and youth organisations have been contacted to nominate potential candidates for the forthcoming Youth elections which will take place between Monday 13th and Sunday 19th March. The results from the count will be on Monday 20th March at 4.30pm in the Council Chambers.

The Social Action Fund project delivered in partnership between the Young People's Service, SLYNCS and Blackburn Youth Zone held a celebration evening for the 19 projects that were funded. The event held at Blackburn Youth Zone on Friday 16th December 2016 provided young people with the opportunity to show case the positive contributions they made to their local communities by accessing the social action fund. A total of £15,000 was utilised to fund the first cohort of projects and similarly a second cohort of projects will be supported in 2017.

LEISURE

Apprenticeship Success

In 2015 Leisure recruited its first apprentice posts for many years. Workforce succession planning was an important principle as well as the on-site, closer working with Blackburn College at Blackburn Sports and Leisure Centre (BSLC). These first apprentices are now completing their placements and qualifications. BSLC's gym apprentice has successfully secured a contracted post within leisure.

Witton Park Arena and Events

Witton Park was a finalist as one of the top 3 parks in the country for its athletics provision and activities aimed at increasing participation at the recent Fields in Trust Awards. It is heartening to see the increased activities programme and events at Witton Park receive recognition at a National level.

Witton Park will again host the Royal Lancashire Show in 2017. Investment secured through section 106 monies to improve the drainage of the show field is crucial to secure this event and many other event bookings. Show field enhancements will also benefit established events such as the Lions' Bonfire.

The 2016 Annual Bonfire and Fireworks display attracted 15,000 people and enabled families to enjoy the Bonfire and a Fireworks display in a safe environment. The event also raised c. £10,000 for local charities. Closer partnership working between the Lions and the Council has not only reduced costs, but also improved the event itself.

Venues

November saw 2 sell out nights of Joe Brown at DLT and a sell out for the Lancashire Hotpots at KGH. There were also good audiences for Jimmy Carr; Sean Lock (sell-out); Bay City Rollers and UB40. KGH also hosted its first Comic Con with 1,500 visitors bringing a new audience demographic to Blackburn and KGH. Programme diversification is also being focussed on with a repeat S2S event confirmed for April 2017 (1,800 people attended 1st event) as are bookings for 4 nights of Boxing in 2017.

Attracting new audiences has been a real focus for the Venues team following the in-year restructure. Externalising the digital social media engagement to specialists Square Cactus is supporting this priority and showing a positive impact.

LIBRARIES

Summer Reading Challenge:

Regional results indicate that BwD have performed significantly better than some of our neighbouring authorities including Blackpool, Bury and Rochdale. 1,228 children enrolled in the reading initiative across our libraries and we enlisted the support of 3 young volunteers who promoted the scheme and helped participants to select titles to read and enjoy.

It's worth mentioning that our in-house inter-library branch prize, which is awarded to the library that increases its enrolments and then achieves the highest percentage of completions, was won by Livesey Library. A great achievement for the very committed team of volunteers and a great endorsement of the support they provide.

Item 14.5

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS AND PREVENTION

**COUNCILLOR
ARSHID MAHMOOD**

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR:
SAYYED OSMAN
DATE: January 2017**

Community Safety

- The Sub Regional CCTV Hub based in Blackburn with Darwen and servicing the wider east and central Lancashire areas is now fuller operational with all functions and personnel transferred across to the Northgate Suite Control room. An official Launch event is planned for the 22nd March with facilitated visits available for members and staff.
- A National Lottery funded extension to our early intervention approach to domestic abuse, launched before Christmas, has begun in earnest. Staff from Changing Lives, are the recipient of the grant, and are working with colleagues from children and adult social care to mitigate demand, allowing services to concentrate on complex cases which require intensive and sustained support.
- The Community Safety team have issued 24 Community Protection Warnings out to owners of vehicles being driven anti socially in the last 6 months, to include a further 6 in January. Should there be further evidence of continued anti-social driving from these vehicles the council will issue a notice which will allow the owner to be taken to court where the council can request the vehicle is seized. This is part of our zero tolerance approach to road safety. The team are also developing a trial of in car recording devices to be used in partnership with residents in areas where road safety is a heightened concern. The devices can evidence poor driving which can be used to target the owners and drivers of those vehicles.

Housing

- Homelessness Trailblazer for Adolescents : the Council in collaboration with Lancashire County Council and the Pennine Lancashire Districts have successfully bid to government for funding for a project to prevent youth homelessness. It's all about taking an innovative and new approach to preventing young people aged between 14 and 25 from becoming homeless in the first place. We will launch a new website focusing on educating and supporting young people about homelessness.. We'll be working in the community to support young people who are at risk of becoming homeless. This will include working with schools and parents to educate them about homelessness and providing mediation when appropriate to ensure young people can resolve any difficulties and stay with their families rather than becoming homeless. The project is worth £734k over 2 years.
- The Central Heating Fund :- the first time central heating project is entering its final phase as we now have sufficient applications to fully deliver. Currently the project is scheduled to complete at the end of February and we will be seeking permission from government to extend to allow remaining payments in to March.
- Consultation on the new Selective Landlord Licensing scheme for Darwen has been completed and we will shortly be seeking approval from Executive Board to designate the new area. This will build on the improvements in condition and safety of properties, and landlord management practices achieved in the earlier designation.
- The Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) Project working with vulnerable adults who are appearing as homeless and associated work with landlords to improve management of larger Houses in Multiple Occupation is continuing.

Lancashire Volunteer Partnership Project

A project funded by the Police Innovation Fund aims to provide additional volunteer opportunities across the whole public sector. Following a successful launch in Preston the project is shortly to be rolled out in Blackburn with Darwen. A recruitment drive will take place to grow and support volunteers to work with vulnerable people within our neighbourhoods. Referrals will be taken as “step down” from Transforming Lives and Adult services. Full training and ongoing support will be provided to volunteers to ensure they are able to complement and add value to existing Prevention work already underway.

Item 14.6

Item 14.6

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES – 26 January 2017

COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICER: DENISE PARK

Item 14.7

Financial Services - Following a procurement exercise, Civica Financials was selected as the new Council finance system. The core modules of the new system should be implemented by April 2017 and will help to drive efficiencies by reducing the amount of manual/paper processes we use. It will also facilitate improved and timely access for budget holders to finance information. The other key focus at this time is development of the 2017/18 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in preparation for Finance Council next month.

Benefits - The implementation work for the Landlord Portal has now been completed and all landlords who receive direct payments have received numerous communications asking them to sign up to the new system as all paper payment schedules have now ceased.

Council Tax and Business Rates - In the continued roll out of the digital programme, Council Tax and Business Rates customers will see the launch of paperless/e-billing and an on-line account facility. This has recently been launched for members and staff who live in the borough. A major promotional push has commenced as we try to sign up as many customers as possible prior to March 2017. The Business Rates team ceased taking customer telephone calls in November as the service has become fully digitised/on-line. After consultation with the Magistrates Court, it has been agreed that we will still accept customer telephone calls that relate to the issue of a summons.

Welfare Cap - The DWP has now issued a further 104 cases that require a cap on welfare through a reduction of Housing Benefit. This new list increases the number of cases in the borough to 146, with a further 14 cases currently under review. A final decision will be made on these cases once we have liaised with both the DWP and the customer.

Below is a snapshot of welfare/benefit that has been lost (per week) by the claimant:

£1.00 - £49.99 = 73 cases

£50.00 - £99.99 = 68 cases

£100+ = 5 cases

The total weekly benefit loss of the capped cases is currently **£6,758.25** per week (this includes those re-capped at the new rate).

Audit & Assurance- Under the Council Constitution and Financial Regulations, the Council and schools are required to have adequate insurance cover in place. The Insurance Team has commenced re-procurement and requested bids for three year contracts, with an option to extend this for a further two years.

Registrars – In the recent Stock and Security Assurance Audit Assessment by the General Register Office, the Registrars service was given a positive rating of “High” in their assessment.

HR - The new HR & Payroll System has recently been upgraded to facilitate the continued roll out of manager/employee self-service. New modules continue to be introduced which are meeting the Council’s digitisation objectives and contributing to the Council’s ability to reduce costs of back office services. The HR Service will also see reductions in size this year as the impact of these changes and other workforce review changes are implemented, whilst at the same time the service continues to develop its service offer to an increasing external customer base.

Legal - The well documented challenges facing social care services and the increased demand particularly for children's and adults social care interventions, has continued to place pressure on the legal services team which at the same time has had its team to play in contributing to budget savings as part of the approved finance plans of the council. The team has recently been restructured to deliver the final phase of a 3 year budget reduction programme and the revised structure is expected to be fully in place by April 2017. The new structure will continue the development of more flexible working to support the challenges presented by the increasing workloads referenced above.

Corporate Services - The team has been working to deliver one of the most significant workforce changes as part of the workforce review programme. This restructure will deliver savings of approximately 40% from administrative support services by a combination of new ways of working, cessation of certain activities, automation of processes and combining support systems currently operating independently across council departments. The Corporate services team will from April provide administrative support across all departments. Corporate Services also includes Communications and Democratic Services both areas have also been subject to review with new models of service being put in place for April 2017. For these areas, as in others, their ability to maximise the digitisation of services provided and increase income from external sources is increasingly important as the funding provided to the Council has reduced so significantly over recent times.

CIVIL CONTINGENCIES UPDATE

Schools Community Resilience Programme – This has been successfully piloted with 2 primary schools, and their feedback and comments have been incorporated into a final package which is now available as an off the shelf pack for all BwD primary schools. This raises pupils' awareness of self-resilience, community self-help, grab bags and home emergency plans and fits into PHSE and Key Stage programmes.

The Get Ready for Winter Campaign was promoted through a number of opportunities with partners. It is aimed at the community to engender self-resilience and self-help especially through the winter months. The Flood Awareness Campaign included our updated policy on Sandbags with letters issued to all businesses and residential properties within potential flood zones and 2 face to face drop in sessions were held in both Blackburn and Darwen in September 2016.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR SCHOOLS & EDUCATION

COUNCILLOR DAVE HARLING

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: LINDA CLEGG ^{Item 14.8}
DATE: 26th JANUARY 2016

GCSE STRONG PERFORMANCE

Recently published GCSE figures show Blackburn with Darwen to be the strongest performing local authority in the region in the new progress measures in Secondary schools and 7th best in pure attainment terms. They also revealed that we have the strongest performing school in the entire country, in terms of the progress made from entry into secondary school to GCSEs (Tauheedul Girls High School).

Against a regional context of weak performance, where only 4 of the 23 Local Authorities had a positive figure for Progress 8 (the new national progress measure), Blackburn with Darwen had the best figure, followed by Trafford, Cheshire West and Stockport. Blackburn with Darwen not only outperforms Lancashire County Council in aggregate, but outperforms every single district – from Ribble Valley, Chorley and South Ribble, to all of the eastern districts (Hyndburn, Rossendale, Burnley and Pendle). In pure attainment terms, Blackburn with Darwen ranked behind only Trafford, Wirral, Cheshire East, Stockport, Cheshire West and Bury – all considerably leafier than the borough. We outperformed Lancashire in its totality and comfortably outperformed other similar East Lancashire districts (Hyndburn, Pendle and Burnley).

In summary: on progress, our Secondary schools outperformed secondary schools in any other area of the North West. On simple threshold attainment, they comfortably outperformed all similar areas in the region and performed at a level in line with schools in much more affluent parts of the North West (Cheshire and the more affluent parts of Manchester).

SCHOOL INSPECTIONS UPDATE

Four Ofsted school inspection reports have been published since the last Council Forum report. Two primary schools have improved on their previous judgement of 'requires improvement' to 'good'. The Inspector remarked that St Stephen's Tockholes C of E Primary School has benefitted from the partnership with Blackburn the Redeemer C of E Primary School which have provided wider opportunities for pupils to learn collaboratively. Meadowhead Infants was judged 'good' in all areas and the report highlighted that the school had improved considerably with raised standards and good opportunities for pupils to achieve and develop.

Witton Academy received it's first inspection since becoming an Academy in May 2014 and was again judged 'good' overall. The report praised areas of outstanding teaching specifically in physical education, expressive arts, food technology and religious education.

St Antony's RC Primary School maintained a 'requires improvement' judgement with a 'good' for overall effectiveness of early years provision. Inspectors acknowledged improvements in the quality of teaching for pupils in early years and in upper key stage and recommended that pupils in other areas of the school are challenged appropriately to improve on the judgement.

UNDERGRADUATE SUPPORT PROGRAMME

The Chief Executive has written to the borough's 2016 A Level and vocational high achievers to offer employer support throughout the duration of their studies. As well as gaining ongoing work experience it is hoped that the project will encourage young people return to the borough to live and work as graduates. Item 14.8

The response from young people has been very positive and so far 16 matches have been made. Employers who have signed up include Blackburn Rugby Football Club, Campbell Driver Partnership, Patrick Grant Community Clothing Partnership, WEC Group, the NHS and the Council.

CAROL CONCERT IN THE CATHEDRAL

Over 400 Primary aged pupils from across 15 schools took part in two Christmas concerts at Blackburn Cathedral. Each school had the opportunity to perform an individual festive song and performance standards were very high. The schools joined together to perform three massed songs, two congregational carols and the music was supported by the Organ Scholar at Blackburn Cathedral.

OFSTED ANNUAL EDUCATION & SKILLS REPORT

The Ofsted Education and Skills Annual Report for the North West region for the 2015/16 academic year has highlighted excellent performance progress within our schools. Secondary schools in the borough ranked 4th out of 23 schools with 90% of pupils attending good or outstanding schools, up from 76% the previous year. Primary schools also provided a good news story with 86% of pupils attending good or outstanding schools which is an increase of 15% over the past 4 years.

AREA BASED REVIEW

Blackburn with Darwen is part of the pan-Lancashire Area Based Review alongside Blackpool and Lancashire to establish the "health" of colleges. The review will run until Spring 2017 and cover the financial resilience of colleges and their ability to offer high quality education and training, based on the needs of learners and employers within the local area. All of the colleges, their governors and representative bodies in the borough are involved in the review.

The agencies taking part in the review are the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), Education Funding Agency, Regional Schools Commissioner, Ofsted and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

To date the Local Authorities and the LEP have completed their presentation on current and future need gaps and colleges have presented their response. Discussions are underway about potential physical changes including college mergers.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION

Item 14.9

COUNCILLOR PHIL RILEY

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: BRIAN BAILEY

DATE: JANUARY 2017

CATHEDRAL QUARTER UPDATE

Office lettings are accelerating with Govnet and Capita now occupying the 1st and 2nd floors. Further announcements for new tenants on the 3rd, and 5th floors are planned for this quarter. Significantly both tenants are new to the Borough. Further interest in the 4th floor and part of the 2nd floor is being progressed. A successful employment day for the Turtle Bay restaurant was held at Ewood Park in early January. The restaurant fit out will be completed this month. On the back of the opening of Turtle Bay in February (date tbc), marketing of the retail and restaurant units under the office building is being relaunched. The office building has been nominated for the British Council of Offices Awards for Excellence 2017 by BDP architects and the award will be announced at an event in Manchester in April.

KINGSWOOD HOMES DEVELOPMENT

The Planning and Highways Committee meeting on 15TH December resolved to approve the planning application for 167 new homes, subject to the signing of the Section 106 legal agreement for contributions towards off-site highway works and transport initiatives. The agreement was signed and sealed on 5th January, and so planning permission was formally issued on the same day. Kingswood Homes intend to be on site before the end of January. This will form Phase A of the Gib Lane Development, with Wainhomes already building 79 new homes at Phase B. A planning application for Phase C is expected within the next few weeks.

GREAT BRITISH HIGH STREET AWARD

Blackburn town centre has beaten hundreds of high streets across the country to be named Britain's best overall. More than 500,000 votes were cast in the third annual Great British High Street Awards and Blackburn scored well enough to take home the crown, beating 26 other finalists. Blackburn will now receive the £10,000 grand prize, as well as a trophy awarded at a ceremony in London on 12 December 2016. Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said: "Our high streets are going from strength to strength as this year's [Great British High Street competition](#) shows. Town centres are being revitalised, with vacancy rates falling over the last year, and Blackburn is a great example of how hard work and support for local businesses can turn things around. The strong Business Improvement District is working closely with the Council to invest in the town and put on a vibrant calendar of events that has seen visitors flock in their thousands to the town centre – long may it continue." DCLG judges praised the Partnership's hard work to turn around the town and hailed it as an inspiration to high streets across the country.

HOUSING ZONE

Housing Zone designation was approved by HCA on 11th November 2016 and an invitation to bid for capacity funding to support delivery of the HZ in SE Blackburn was submitted on 9th December. If successful, extra resource will enable a full package of site investigations and additional studies to be undertaken to be included as part of the procurement and marketing package. In the meantime work with Local

Partnerships (consultancy agency owned by the Treasury and the LGA) continues with a potential opportunity to obtain commercial and procurement advice temporary officers between now and end of March when capacity funding may become available to support additional resource. Soft market testing continues with potential partners who have expressed interest in taking the HZ forward.

PLANNING PERFORMANCE

The Government's performance tables for planning services were published in December, confirming that the Council has exceeded government targets. The performance is measured over a 2 year period ending September 2016. It is expected that the target will be increased in 2018. If the Council's performance continues at the same level during 2017 it should easily achieve the revised 2018 performance targets.

HIVE UPDATE

Hive's offer to our businesses in 2017 continues to improve. Lancaster University and Nat West Bank are bringing their successful Business Masterclass events to Blackburn with three events planned starting on 16th February in the lecture theatre at the University Centre at Blackburn college and subsequent events planned for May and September.

Hive Business School is progressing well with an increasing number of the schools in the borough now taking part and linked with a local business providing support for young people in learning about work and career choices. The Hive supported Primary Engineer Project has 11 primary schools taking part to encourage young people into engineering subjects and careers. The Supported Internship programme is also progressing well with the first internships in place by September 2017.

A21 LATEST AWARDS

The Portfolio's Assistance to Industry grants provide modest but very useful capital grants to businesses in the borough helping to bring forward investment, create jobs and improve properties and the streetscapes. 31 businesses benefitted in the first three quarters of 2016/17 resulting in the creation of 100 jobs with a further 51 jobs expected in the near future. This has enabled many businesses in the borough to expand and add value to the economy and has also contributed to an improvement in the quality of the town centre offer in both Blackburn and Darwen town centres.

BUS SERVICES

Darwen Coach Services ceased trading on Thursday 15th December 2016 which has meant that a number of key local bus services throughout Blackburn and Darwen stopped operating. School services have been covered on a temporary basis and are now in the process of being re-procured. The Council has had ongoing discussions with local bus operators about taking on bus services withdrawn by DCS.

Services to Wensley Fold and Lammack, Sunnybower and Little Harwood and Highercroft will recommence on the 16th January 2017 (Blackburn Private Hire). The former 33 service linking Darwen, Lower Darwen, Royal Blackburn Hospital and Blackburn will be partially reinstated from the 30th January 2017 (Moving People) as will replacement Darwen Town and rural routes (Travel Assist).