

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR MOHAMMED KHAN

Date: 20th April 2017

National Festival of Making

On Saturday 6th and Sunday 7th of May Blackburn will host the first national Festival of Making. As one of the original Northern Powerhouses it is only fitting that we now celebrate and showcase the best of British innovation and making within the 21st century. Blackburn town centre, Cathedral Quarter and venues in the town centre will play host to a number of different exhibitions and events and the festival is expected to bring a lot of people into the town.

This event will not only show case making but also showcase the new Blackburn with Darwen and this will be an excellent opportunity to show the rest of the North West and the UK just what is available within our borough. There are number of local businesses from both Blackburn and Darwen that are engaged, supporting and delivering content and activity over the weekend.

I can also confirm that the BBC are committed partners of the event, contributing to the festival programme and live segments of many popular BBC programmes are planned to come from Blackburn, so it is essential that the perception of our town is positive.

In the run up to the festival a big Your Call clean-up is planned for the week before and I would urge ward councillors and community organisations to get involved.

I invite all members to attend the festival and promote our borough as the great place that we know it to be.

Health and Social Care Transformation Update

Thanks to all members who attended the recent councillors briefing on the local and regional plans to change health and care. I hope members found it useful. It is important for us all to have a good understanding of what the Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP) means for Blackburn with Darwen, what it means for the Council, especially in terms of our budget and how we, as elected representatives, can shape and influence it.

I have previously voiced concerns on whether what is happening is being explained in a way people can understand. The issues are complex and sometimes the language used to describe them is not simple enough. I am pleased to see that Healthier Lancashire and South Cumbria has published an easy to understand guide to the challenges in health and care for the region and how organisations are working together to create solutions to tackle them. This is available at www.healthierlsc.co.uk

There has also been a lot of good work on a local level, through Together A Healthier Future programme, to encourage people to get involved in the process. A three minute video can be found on www.togetherahealthierfuture.org.uk. The video updates on the conversations the local change programme has been having with people and what the next steps are.

I am also very pleased to see Dr Chris Clayton being appointed Chief Officer for the Together A Healthier Future Programme following Sally McIvor's departure. I wish him well in his new role and look forward to working with him.

It is very clear there is a huge financial challenge for the region to overcome. The work both locally and regionally is aimed at meeting that financial challenge. However, given the significant funding pressure, it may prove impossible to close the £570m gap and therefore I once again urge fellow members to lobby the Government when possible.

Shadow Lancashire Combined Authority

I'm sure members will share Lancashire Leaders' increasing frustration at the Government's lack of response over progress to create the Lancashire Combined Authority. A letter was sent to the Secretary of State Sajid Javid more than two months ago but we are no clearer on what direction the Government wants to take.

Members will be aware that the Combined Authority was due to be formally created at the start of April, however the Government are clearly focussing on Brexit and pushing through existing devolution deals which has unfortunately held up the process for Lancashire.

However, despite the slow progress from the Government, Leaders have been collaborating and there is real positivity amongst Lancashire council that we can achieve great things for the whole of the County.

We have been able to make progress on shaping future improvement to transport links, influencing Transport for the North and the local skills agenda following the Area Review of Further Education. We have also attracted one of the largest Growth Deal 3 allocations in the country, with millions of pounds coming to Blackburn with Darwen to go towards the Pennine Gateways project that will deliver key improvements at three of our main gateways into Blackburn off the M65 at junctions 4, 5 and 6. In addition the Combined Authority has secured over £600,000 as part of the Government's One Public Estate programme and most recently, as a Combined Authority have submitted a bid to become a Place based pilot for Sport England with £130m available for up to 10 areas.

We will continue to press the Government for answers but in the meantime Leaders will work together to make sure Lancashire has a voice at Downing Street and is a key part of the Northern Powerhouse.

Social Integration

Promoting and supporting social integration is a key priority for this Council. I believe the most valuable thing we can do as a Council is to continue to have some of the best opportunities for people to get together, mix and enjoy themselves and as a result break down barriers.

That's everything from helping schools to successfully link up, to supporting high quality events and major cultural activities to running sports and leisure and youth facilities.

Another way we are doing this is supporting people who do make the borough a better place. In February, I was delighted to be invited to the One Voice Awards dinner to present the Council Leader's Award to a very deserving winner. The award acknowledges people that have promoted community cohesion through leadership.

Chris Seddon was this year's recipient. She was nominated for her work supporting the refugee community and the Blackburn YMCA. She has also served as a governor of a local school for 30 years as well as volunteering for a wide range of community activities.

Chris is a worthy winner of this award. She has done much good work over the years to promote community togetherness. She has led efforts to build bridges between different communities.

Chris is one of many people in Blackburn with Darwen who show this borough is a friendly and neighbourly place to live. Of course we have challenges, most areas do. But volunteers like Chris are doing their bit and bringing people together.

My pledge to people like Chris, to the good neighbours and community groups who make Your Call happen and make this borough a better place, is this – this Council will support you.

Northern Powerhouse Conference

In February, Manchester hosted the second annual Northern Powerhouse Conference and I am delighted to report that Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council was well represented at this event promoting our Capita place based partnership and also through the Lancashire LEP and Combined Authority stand. The Northern Powerhouse represents the future in terms growth and development and I feel that it is only right that the Council flies the flag for our towns and our people at events like this.

Being part of the Northern Powerhouse conversation is essential in terms of our own growth and prosperity. By promoting and attracting new investment and business opportunities or by the opportunities opened up through greater devolution and public sector reform.

I was pleased to see our Council's Chief Executive, Harry Catherall, deliver a powerful speech to the conference on the successes of working together in partnership to achieve positive local outcomes, particularly the role of this Council in staying the course on key projects when others would not.

Our attendance at this summit not only shows the Councils commitment to benefit from the Northern Powerhouse but also our ambition to grow and develop along with the rest of North by taking up the opportunities available us.

National Industrial Strategy Consultation

I welcome the publication of the Government's Industrial Strategy Green Paper. Industry and manufacturing are at the heart of our communities and contribute much to the shared heritage of both Blackburn and Darwen. Today we still the help and support more manufactures locate here.

As a consultation exercise the publication of this Green paper allows us as a local authority to give our views on the Governments policy intentions and I can inform members that as an authority we have, alongside Lancashire County Council and Blackpool Borough Council submitted our response.

I feel that the challenges of the coming months and years, especially with the uncertainties of Brexit, we cannot wait for this strategy to be implemented if we are to ensure future growth and economic prosperity.

Members will note that in recent years the Local Authority along with partners from the Local Strategic Partnership, the Lancashire LEP and the HIVE have all been working hard to help formulate and implement our Plan for Prosperity and growth plans. This strategy and any other positive actions which helps us locally from central government will be greatly welcomed.

I look forward to the publication of the Industrial Strategy White Paper later this year and I hope this Conservative Government has listened to our feedback from a place with a very long track record of being a hub for manufacturing and innovation.

New East Lancashire Chamber of Commerce Chief Executive

I welcome the appointment of Miranda Barker as the new Chief Executive of the East Lancashire Chamber of Commerce, following the retirement of Mike Damms.

I know Mike will be missed not just by Local Authorities but the wider business community. His support to businesses and his championing of East Lancashire over his many years of service has been crucial to the successes of our economic growth and development.

Blackburn with Darwen Council looks forward to working with Miranda.