

**COUNCIL FORUM MEETING**  
**Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2015**

**PRESENT** –*The Mayor Councillor A. Cottam (in the Chair), Councillors Akhtar H., Akhtar P., Ali, Bateson, Brookfield, Browne, Casey, Connor, Daley, Davies, Entwistle, Evans, Foster D., Foster K., Gee, Groves, Gunn, Hardman, Harling, Hollern, Hollings, Humphrys, Hussain F., Hussain I., Jan-Virmani, Johnson, Kay, Khan M., Khan Z., Khonat H., Khonat S., Lee, Liddle, Mahmood, Maxfield, McFall, Mulla, Nuttall, O’Keeffe, Patel, Pearson, Rehman, Riley, Roberts, Shorrock, Sidat, Slater Jacqueline, Slater John, Smith D., Smith J., Talbot, Taylor, Whalley, Whittle and Wright.*

**RESOLUTIONS**

**52 Notice Convening Meeting**

The Chief Executive read out the notice convening the meeting.

**53. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Desai, Hussain S, McKinlay, Rigby C, Rigby J, Slater Julie, Surve and Walsh.

**54. Declarations of Interest**

Declarations of Interest were received from with regard to agenda item 9 (Local Council Tax Support Scheme and Council Tax Discounts 2015/16):-

Councillors: Connor, Entwistle, Hussain I., Jan-Virmani, Khonat H., Khonat S., Mahmood, Mulla, Rehman, Talbot, Taylor, Whittle, Foster D., and Foster K.

**55. Mayoral Communications**

The Mayor, Councillor Alan Cottam, updated Members on a number of events that he had recently attended, including the Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> January at Blackburn Town Hall, where the Mayor had addressed a full Council Chamber where even all the gallery seats were occupied. The Mayor expressed how pleased he was to see so many young people from the town’s schools take such an active part in the ceremony, and that with the subject holding such a high profile on the school’s curriculum future ceremonies should go from strength to strength. The Mayor also referred to recent School visits, a forthcoming visit to York for the inauguration of the Bishop of Burnley, and he also encouraged Members to purchase tickets for the Mayor’s Ball in April.

In conclusion the Mayor asked all present to stand in a minutes silence for former Councillor Arif Waghat who served on the council from May 2006 to May 2010 and a dedicated Children Services employee; Jon Amos who had worked at Appletrees, who had passed away suddenly on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> January after a sudden and acute illness would be dearly missed by the staff and children.

**56. Council Forum**

The Chief Executive advised that no questions had been received under Procedure Rule 10.

**57. Motions submitted under Procedure Rule 12**

The Chief Executive advised that no Notices of Motion had been submitted under Procedure Rule 12.

*At this point of the meeting, the Councillors who had declared an interest at Agenda Item 9 left the room.*

**58. Local Council Tax Support Scheme and Council Tax Discounts 2015/16**

A report was submitted which requested Council to consider recommendations relating to the adoption of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2015/16 and to consider current Council Tax discounts for empty properties.

In preparation for setting the budget for 2015/16, the Council was obliged to formally continue the scheme already agreed or make any adjustments prior to 1st April 2015. The report sought to fulfil the necessary legal requirements and confirm Blackburn with Darwen BC's Council Tax Support scheme for 2015/16.

In terms of Council Tax discounts for empty properties, the Government had provided discretion for Councils in respect of the amount of Council Tax that is charged to empty properties. Limiting the discounts in Council Tax for empty properties supported the Council's overall aim of encouraging owners of empty properties to bring them back into use, and reduce the number of long term empty properties throughout the Borough.

It was considered that retaining a 100% discount for an initial period – currently 6 months - allowed landlords more than sufficient time to re-let properties following the turnover of tenants.

A consultation exercise has been running on the Council website asking whether the current discount periods should be retained, removed or reduced. Feedback from this consultation would be considered by Executive

Board and reported to Finance Council which may then wish to consider amending the discount periods.

**RESOLVED –**

- a) The contents of the report are noted.
- b) The welfare changes made in respect of Housing Benefit assessments are adopted for the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2015/16.
- c) The localised Council Tax Support Scheme that was approved by Council in January 2014 is continued for the financial year 2015/16 as set out in Appendix A of the report.
- d) Any subsequent technical amendments to the Council Tax Support Scheme that may be required following legislative changes are delegated to the Director of Finance & IT in consultation with the Executive Member, Resources.
- e) Council notes the current level of discount and consultation on council tax discounts for properties that require major repair or are undergoing structural alteration.
- f) Council notes the current level of discount and consultation on council tax discounts for unoccupied and unfurnished properties.

*At this point of the meeting Members who had declared an interest returned to the meeting.*

**59. Policy and Corporate Resources Committee**

The Chair of the Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee presented an update report on the work of the Committee.

The Chair explained that all Committees have continued to be very active and that the agreed work programmes for the first five rounds of meetings for all Scrutiny Committees had been delivered. He advised that the Regeneration and Neighbourhoods Committee had reviewed the 20mph speed limit pilot along with some pre-decision scrutiny work on car parking. The Children and Young People and the Corporate Parenting Specialist Advisory Group had both considered what Council and partnership services were available to Looked After Children and Care leavers; advising that this work is ongoing and will conclude at the next round of meetings. He informed Council that this Committee had also received responses to recommendations from young people on affordable transport.

Councillor Shorrocks explained that the Health and Adult Social Care Committee, having invited a series of key stakeholders to the last meeting had continued to review food poverty, food banks and the effects of welfare reform. In conclusion he informed Council that the Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee had reviewed progress on the Community Safety annual report and would be receiving an update from the

Executive Member for Resources on the Council's budget and savings, as well as the statutory report outlining the Councils use of Regulatory Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

**RESOLVED** – That the report of the Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

**60. Reports of Executive Members with Portfolios**

Council Forum received and considered reports of the Leader and Executive Member with Portfolios. These were considered as follows:

The Leader, Neighbourhoods, Housing and Customer Services, Regeneration, Resources, Schools and Education, Health and Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Environment, and Leisure, Culture and Young People.

In moving their reports, the Leader and the Executive Member for Children's Services made reference to the National Takeover Day Event where nearly 80 young people came into the Council and (whilst guided by a number of Executive Members) were tasked with coming up with a budget that met the needs of the boroughs residents. Assurances were made to share the outcomes with the caveat that some of the figures and anticipated surpluses assumed by the young people would need to be considered in the spirit of the exercise.

In response to comments, the Executive Member for Regeneration reflected that anecdotes outlining traffic delays caused by Pennine Reach road works, did not in all cases reflect the CCTV footage when analysed, and that people's experiences seemed to present quite a mixed picture. Responding to several comments regarding gritting and the work of the winter maintenance team, the Executive Member for Environment wished for his thanks to be placed on record for the excellent, hard and dedicated work of the team. He explained that as recent as that morning they had been involved in retrieving two school buses from difficulties in Hoddlesden. The Mayor advised that he wished to echo other Members' comments that the winter maintenance team did a wonderful job. This sentiment was shared across the chamber.

**RESOLVED** – That the reports from the Leader and Executive Members for Neighbourhoods, Housing and Customer Services, Regeneration, Resources, Schools and Education, Health and Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Environment, and Leisure, Culture and Young People, be noted.

**34. To Consider any questions received from Members under Procedure Rule 11**

The Chief Executive announced that no questions had been received under Procedure Rule 11.

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

MAYOR