

**COUNCIL FORUM MEETING**  
**Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013**

**PRESENT** –*The Mayor Councillor Z. Khan (in the Chair), Councillors Akhtar, Bateson, Browne, Connor, Cottam, Davies, Desai, Entwistle, Evans, Foster D, Foster K, Gee, Groves, Hardman, Harling D, Hirst, Hollern, Hollings P, Humphrys T, Hussain F., Hussain I., Hussain S, Jan-Virmani, Johnson, Kay, Khan M., Khonat H. Khonat S, Lee, Liddle, Mahmood, McFall, Mulla, Nuttall, O’Keeffe, Oldfield, Patel, Pearson D., Pearson J., Rigby C., Rigby J., Riley, Shorrocks, Sidat, Slater Jacqueline, Slater John, Slater Julie, Smith D, Smith J, Solkar, Surve, Talbot, Tapp, Taylor B, Thayne, Walsh C., Walsh D., Whalley and Wright.*

**RESOLUTIONS**

**64. Notice Convening Meeting**

The Chief Executive read the notice convening the meeting.

**65. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Brookfield, Daley, Maxfield, and Rehman.

**66. Minutes of the Council Forum Meeting held on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the Council Forum meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012 be approved as a correct record.

**67. Declarations of interest**

*Council were advised that there had been a significant number of declarations of interest received by the Monitoring Officer in relation to agenda item 9 (Council Tax Support Scheme and Changes to Empty Property and Second Home Discounts). Accordingly, in order to facilitate an effective discharge of the democratic process, the Standards Committee had granted a dispensation to all Council Members, to allow them to participate in discussions and vote on the agenda item 9 only. This would allow all Members including those Members who may be affected by any decision to openly participate in the discussion and vote on agenda item 9.*

Additional Declarations of Interest were received by Councillors Taylor, McFall, and Bateson – All Disclosable Pecuniary interest.

**68. Mayoral Communications**

The Mayor asked all present to stand for a minute's silence, in memory of a former Councillor and Mayor, the late Reverend Jim Watson who had recently passed away.

The Mayor informed the Members that he has attended many engagements as well as various community and festive events both in Blackburn and Darwen. He added that the highlight had been to welcome His Royal Highness Prince Andrew, on his visit to Training 2000.

On behalf of the Council the Mayor passed on congratulations to Mrs Jacqueline McGrew, Chair of Whitebirk & Intack Tenants and Residents Association who received a MBE and also Margaret Nowell, Headteacher at St Thomas's Centre, the Pupil Referral Unit, who received OBE medal from the Queen's New Years Honours list.

The Mayor also reminded everyone that the Mayor's Ball was on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2013 at King George's Hall and hoped that all could attend and support the event. Members were also reminded of the upcoming Mayors Command Performance which would be held on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> March at Darwen Library Theatre. The Mayor finally thanked everyone who attended the Holocaust Memorial Day Event on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

**69. Council Forum**

The Chief Executive advised that no questions from members of the public under Procedure Rule 10 had been received.

**70. To consider motions submitted under Procedure Rule 12**

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

**71. Localised Council Tax Support Scheme and changes to empty property and second home discounts 2013/14**

Members were advised that approval of the recommendations in the report directly impacted on the calculation of the tax base and that any proposed amendments should have been discussed with the Director of Finance in advance of the meeting to enable a revised tax base to be calculated if necessary.

The Executive Member for Resources presented a report seeking approval for the adoption of the localised Council Tax Support Scheme as detailed in Appendix A of the report submitted and sought approval for the removal of the 50% discount and the introduction of increased Council Tax charges for empty properties and second homes that had remained empty for over 6 months. In addition, for properties that have remained empty for over 2

years, it was proposed that the charge be raised to 150% of the assigned band.

During the Spending Review of 2010, the Government announced its intention to replace the current national Council Tax Benefit scheme with a localised scheme from 2013-2014 with a reduction in its award/expenditure by 10%. The Welfare Reform Act 2012, contains provisions which abolish Council Tax Benefit and which see it replaced with localised schemes that will be reductions from Council Tax bills administered by Local Authorities.

Billing Authorities in England must, following a period of consultation, develop and adopt a localised scheme to replace Council Tax Benefit by 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013 in readiness for full implementation from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013. Blackburn with Darwen BC's reduction scheme would be named and referred to as the Council Tax Support Scheme.

With effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 the Local Government Act 2012 also gave Local Authorities the power to levy a premium charge on properties that have been empty for over two years.

The impact for Blackburn with Darwen of a reduction in funding for council tax benefit/support, which has been reduced by 10% nationally, is around £1.8M.

In considering the Council's own localised scheme, there were three main options available which were outlined in the report submitted.

The Council was recommended to introduce a localised Council Tax Support Scheme that reduced the amount of support given to all working age claimants by 20%.

## **RESOLVED -**

- a) That the contents of the report are noted;
- b) That the localised Council Tax Support scheme detailed in Appendix A be approved and implemented from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013;
- c) That the Exceptional Hardship Policy detailed in Appendix B be approved and implemented from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013;
- d) That any subsequent alteration to the Council Tax Support scheme that is required following legislative changes to national welfare schemes be delegated to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Executive Member for Resources;
- e) That the 50% discount for empty properties and second homes that is currently awarded after six months exemption be revoked and the charge increased to 100% of the assigned band;

- f) That the 50% discount that is currently awarded to properties that have been empty for over two years be revoked and a premium charge of 50% levied. This will equate to 150% of the assigned band, and;
- g) That in accordance with the legislation changes that take effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 the class A, C and L exemptions be replaced by a 100% discount. This will result in no financial change for the Tax payers of the Borough.

**72. Approval of Blackburn with Darwen Council's Tax Base and National Non-Domestic Rates income estimate for the financial year 2013/14**

The Council Forum received a report which requested the Council approve the council tax base for the 2013/2014 financial year in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012.

The Council was required to set the council tax base each year between 1 December and 31 January. This is to enable the billing authority (Blackburn with Darwen Council) to notify the tax base to any precepting authorities within its administration area.

Members were also requested to approve the estimate of business rates income for the 2013/2014 financial year in accordance with the Non-Domestic Rating (Rates Retention) Regulations 2012.

The Council was required to calculate how much business rates income it anticipates it would collect for the forthcoming financial year, in order to ascertain how much it would be able to retain and how much it would have to pay to precepting authorities and central government. The Council had to notify central government and any relevant precepting authorities of the amounts calculated by 31 January each year.

**RESOLVED -**

1. That, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by the Council as the council tax base for the Borough of Blackburn with Darwen for the financial year 2013/14 shall be 31,668.44 (gross) and 30,560.04 based on a collection rate of 96.5%.
2. That the corresponding tax bases for each parish and town council together with the non-parish area of Blackburn with Darwen shall be:

Eccleshill	85.40
Livesey	1,813.43
North Turton	1,600.65
Pleasington	250.13

Tockholes	201.11
Yate and Pickup Bank	133.17
Darwen Town Council	6,604.36
Areas with no Parish	19,871.79

based on a collection rate of 96.5%

3. That the delegation to the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Executive Member (Resources), to approve the council tax base each year, as previously agreed by Council on 18 November 2004, is confirmed for future years.
4. That the net business rate yield for 2013/14 shall be calculated as £44,429,000.
5. That in future years, the approval of the estimate of business rates income is delegated to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Executive Member (Resources).

**73. Preparation for Budget 2013/14 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2013/16**

Council Forum received a report containing recommendations following receipt of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2012, early budget savings proposals which support the Budget Strategy and the Council's priorities as agreed at Policy Council on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2012 in advance of the Revenue Budget 2013/14, Medium Term Financial Strategy 2013-16 and the Capital Programme 2013-16 being set at Finance Council on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2013.

In December 2012, the Chancellor announced in his Autumn Statement that further cuts would be required to reduce the deficit nationally. He set overall plans for public spending in 2015/16 and 2016/17 in line with spending reductions over the CSR 2010 period. In addition Local Authorities were now required to find further savings of 2% in 2014/15. A further CSR will be undertaken in 2013.

The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) subsequently published the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2012. Further information and details including revisions and amendments had emerged over the last few weeks with the ring fenced Public Health funding only being announced on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2013. No indicative allocations had yet been published for 2015/16 or 2016/17.

The analysis of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement and pressures the Council faced now confirmed that budget reductions of up to £30M would be required by 2014/15. Given the extent of these reductions and previous experience in 2011/12 (when swift, decisive and successful

action was taken) the Council was once again asked to consider a number of early budget savings options.

Executive Members and officers had been implementing a number of management actions over the course of the last few months in preparation for budget savings requirements to come. This included a strong corporate vacancy management process and inviting applications from staff for voluntary redundancy and/or early retirement. These actions, among others, would enable savings to be made from the deletion of the majority of resultant vacant posts.

Following the approval of the MTFs and the expectation of further significant funding reductions, Executive Members and Officers had reviewed all services and prepared options to deliver budget reductions of approximately 20%. Wherever possible Executive Members and officers had sought to achieve efficiencies, transform and modernise the services delivered and mitigate the impact on the residents of the borough.

The scale of these further budget reductions combined with those already implemented in 2011/12 and 2012/13, would inevitably lead to a significant reduction in the services provided to the residents of the Borough. Executive Members were regretfully recommending that the Council proceed with the savings reductions identified in Appendix 1 of the report submitted.

The savings currently proposed amounted to £13.1M in 2013/14 increasing to £26.3M in 2014/15.

Executive Members would bring further savings options to Finance Council for approval in March 2013 which would enable a two year budget strategy to be agreed.

It was unfortunate but inevitable that there would be a number of compulsory redundancies in the coming months and therefore some staff would need to be put formally at risk of redundancy whilst consultation was undertaken and options developed.

Open applications for ER/VR (early retirement and voluntary redundancy) would continue to be accepted and agreed where there was a financial saving to be made and all vacant posts would be reviewed with a view to deleting wherever possible.

Clearly implementing budget reductions of this scale in addition to those already implemented in recent years presents a huge challenge. It will mean that the Council will continue to undertake radical reviews across all service areas to determine the extent to which, or whether, services continue to be provided by the council

Therefore it was essential that, where practical, decisions were made in advance of Finance Council in March to ensure that savings were maximised in the next two financial years.

Final options to deliver a balanced revenue budget for 2013/14 whilst maintaining an adequate level of reserves and the MTFS 2013-16 would be agreed at Finance Council reflecting the settlement, consultation and other factors.

**RESOLVED -**

- 2.1 Approve the early budget savings proposals for the Revenue Budget 2013/14 and 2014/15 outlined in this report.
- 2.2 Note that staff will be put at risk of redundancy in a number of service areas as a consequence of these proposals in consultation with the relevant Trade Unions.
- 2.3 Approve in principle a freeze on the borough element of Council Tax rates for 2013/14 subject to this being offset by additional specific government grant funding of around £500,000 in each of the next two financial years 2013/14 and 2014/15 which is equivalent to a 1% increase in council tax from 2013/14; and
- 2.4 Note that Finance Council on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2013 will approve the Revenue Budget for 2013/14, the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2013-16, the Capital Programme 2013-16 and the consequent level of Council Tax for 2013/14.

**74. Year Planner 2013/14**

Following submission of the draft schedule of meetings for 2013/14 to the meeting of the Council Forum, Members were asked to approve the final schedule of meetings for 2013/14.

A request was made to include the names of Christian holidays in the Municipal Year Planner.

**RESOLVED -**

That the Municipal Year Planner be accepted subject to the inclusion of the names of major Christian Holidays as opposed to Bank Holiday being the reference.

**75. Policy and Corporate Resources Committee**

The Chair of the Policy and Corporate Resources Committee presented an update report on the work of the Committee. The Chair also updated Council on the Policy & Corporate Resources meeting from the previous night.

In response to a question about the letter that had been sent regarding non-attendance, the Chair advised that the issues applied to all Parties, hence the letters broader circulation.

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

## **76. Reports of Executive Members with Portfolios**

Council Form received and considered reports of the Leader and Executive Members with portfolios. These were considered as follows: The Leader, Environment, Leisure, Culture and Young People, Neighbourhoods, Housing and Customer Services, Regeneration, Resources, Schools and Education, Health and Adult Social Care and Children's Services.

In moving her report, the Leader of the Council updated Members that in the past week a number of sessions had been held with staff, as potentially up to 500 posts would be at risk. She requested that the Opposition send a message to government that the cuts were unfair, too quick and could not deliver smooth transitions in timescales expected.

The Leader was congratulated on her recent appointment as the first Chair of the Lancashire Police and Crime Panel (PCP). In response she advised Council that the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) would have to find £60M worth of cuts, however for the next couple of years got the PCC had committed to continue to fund PCSO'S.

Members mentioned the recent bad weather and commended the use of 4x4's in support of gritting inaccessible areas. Thanks were given to the winter grit squad, and Hoddleston Councillors wished to thank the Council for the grit that had been provided. Further thanks were made for recent fly tipping prosecutions, and vehicle enforcement on the Borough's Taxis.

The Executive Member for Children's Services wished to place on record her thanks to Lawrence Loft as Chair of Local Children's Safeguarding Board, advising Council that a new chair (Nancy Palmer) had been appointed.

Members mentioned the Corporate Parenting event at Darwen Vale on a Saturday morning, expressing disappointment at the lack of Councillors attending, but went on to say that the event had been very good, with a lot of issues faced, not all of which were related to Children's Services.

Finally several Members expressed their condolences to the family of Barbara Magee (Manager of Blakewater Lodge Extra Care Housing) who had passed away recently.



## **RESOLVED –**

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

### **77. To consider any questions received from Members under Procedure Rule 11**

The Chief Executive announced that one question had been received from Members under Procedure Rule 11 as follows:

*From Councillor David Foster to the Chair of the Planning and Highways Committee, Councillor Jim Smith:*

*What steps is the Chair taking to ensure that Members of the Committee only consider “material considerations” when making decisions on planning matters?*

A response to the question and supplementary question was provided by the Chair of Planning and Highways Committee, Councillor Jim Smith.

### **78. Constitution Review and Update.**

Council were advised that the Constitution has been updated and has been made available to all Members and also placed on the Council website. Members were also asked

To approve:

- a) The amendments made to the Constitution to reflect the resolutions passed at full Council;
- b) The amendments made to the Constitution to reflect the new Council management structure, the various provisions of Localism Act 2011 and other legislative changes; and
- c) The amended substitution provisions relating to membership of the Licensing Committee.
- d) To note that a further review of the Constitution will be undertaken to reflect the transfer of public health functions to the Council on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013. A further report will be presented to Council to approve the amendments.

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

MAYOR