

Council Forum

Thursday, 25th March, 2021

6.00 pm

Virtual

[Join Here](#)

AGENDA

1. **Welcome and Apologies**
2. **Prayers by the Mayor's Chaplain**
3. **Minutes Of The Previous Meeting**
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4. **Declarations of Interest**
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5. **Mayoral Communications**
6. **Council Forum**
To consider any questions from members of the public received under Procedure Rule 12.
7. **Motions**
To consider Motions submitted under Procedure Rule 10.
8. **Council Response to Covid-19 Pandemic - One Year on Covid Response** 14 - 21
9. **Updates from other Committees**
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Appendix A - 15 Recommendations
Appendix B Current Pages constitution with proposed changes
Progress of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees
To receive an update from the Standards Committee (attached) and also a joint report from the Chairs of the PEOPLE, PLACE, Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

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

Date Published: Wednesday, 17 March 2021
Denise Park, Chief Executive

FINANCE COUNCIL **Monday 1st March 2021**

PRESENT – *The Deputy Mayor Councillor Derek Hardman, Councillors Afzal, Akhtar H, Akhtar P, Batan, Bateson, Brookfield, Browne, Casey, Connor, Daley, Davies, Desai, Fazal, Floyd, Gee, Gunn, Harling, Hussain I, Hussain M, Hussain S, Jan-Virmani, Kay, Khan M, Khan Z, Khonat, Liddle, Mahmood, Marrow, McFall, McGurk, Oates, Patel, Rawat, Rigby C, Rigby J, Riley, Salton, Sidat, Shorrocks, Slater Ja, Slater Jo, Slater Ju, Slater N, Smith D, Smith J, Talbot, Taylor and Whittle.*

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RESOLUTIONS

43 Welcome and Apologies

The Chief Executive read out the notice convening the meeting and the Deputy Mayor advised how the remote meeting would operate.

After Prayers by the Mayor's Chaplain, a Minute's Silence was observed in memory of former Mayor and Councillor John Williams.

44 Minutes Of The Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Council Forum meeting held on 28th January 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

45 Declarations of Interest

The Chief Executive asked Members to agree a temporary suspension of Procedure Rule 20.5 for this meeting only, to enable those Members who had declared an interest in Agenda Item 8 (specifically in relation to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme – Recommendation 2.11) to remain in the meeting, but not participate in related discussions or vote on that particular recommendation. The temporary suspension of Procedure Rule 20.5 was agreed.

Declarations of Interest in Agenda Item 8 (Recommendation 2.11 Local Council Tax Support Scheme) had been received from Councillors Batan, Akhtar H, Hussain M, Jan-Virmani, Khan M, Mahmood, McGurk, Patel, Talbot, Taylor, Connor, Hardman, Marrow and Fazal

46 Mayoral Communications

The Deputy Mayor reflected on the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, and thanked Officers and Partners for their continuing efforts in responding to the pandemic.

The Deputy Mayor also advised that he was looking forward to his forthcoming Mayoral Year and to brighter days ahead for the Borough.

47 Capital Strategy 2021/22

Members received a report seeking approval for the 2021/22 Capital Strategy, set out in Appendix 1. The capital strategy gave a high-level overview of how the Council's capital

expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contributed to the provision of local public services, along with an overview of how associated risks were managed and the implications for future financial sustainability.

Decisions made on capital and treasury management would have financial consequences for the Authority for many years into the future. Therefore decisions were subject to both a national regulatory framework and to a local policy framework, summarised in this report.

RESOLVED –

That the Capital Strategy for 2021/22 (in Appendix 1), be approved, including:

- a) the proposed Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy, as outlined in Appendix 3
- b) the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement (including the change in policy as set out in the MRP statement for years 2020/21 onwards) which determines the Council's policy for repayment of debt (Appendix 4)
- c) the proposed prudential indicators for the forthcoming year (Appendix 5);
- d) the proposed Investment Strategy for 2021/22, as outlined in Appendix 6.

48 The Robustness of the 2021/22 Budget and the Recommended Level of Reserves

Members were reminded that Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 placed a statutory requirement on the Council's Chief Financial Officer to report on:

- 1 the robustness of the estimates within the overall budget, and
- 2 the adequacy of the proposed level of financial reserves

In setting the Budget for 2021/22, Council was required to have regard to the report when making its budget decisions.

The information provided was to assist Members in their review of the overall Revenue Budget and Capital Programme and to provide assurance to them that financial advice had been provided throughout the budget setting process.

In moving the report, Cllr McGurk, Executive Member for Finance and Governance, made particular reference to the increased minimum level of General Reserves from the current level of £4.0million to £6million, to provide financial resilience in the event of unexpected spending pressures, particularly in the light of the unknown consequences of Covid-19.

RESOLVED – That Finance Council note that:

An overall assessment of the proposed 2021/22 budget, and the assumptions on which this is based, including assumptions regarding demand for services, cost pressures, income collection, inflation and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, has identified that whilst there are risks, the overall budget provisions for the year are considered sufficient to meet the Council's legal responsibilities and obligations.

A review of risks, mitigations and contingencies has also been undertaken alongside the review of reserves and provisions.

Finance Council is recommended to consider the assessment by the Director of Finance of; the robustness of the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme for 2021/22 (as outlined in the report of the Executive Member for Finance and Governance) and the adequacy and recommended level of proposed financial reserves (detailed in **Section 5.2**).

49 Revenue Budget 2021/22, Medium Term Financial Strategy and Capital Programme 2021-24

The Executive Member for Finance and Governance, Councillor Vicky McGurk, on behalf of the Labour Group, presented proposals for the Revenue Budget 2021/22, together with the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and Capital Programme for 2021-2024.

The programme of austerity that began in 2010/11, signalled the start of an unprecedented level of financial challenges across the public sector which had led to significant cuts across many areas. As previously reported, the Borough had experienced one of the largest funding reductions of all authorities in the country in the period since then, despite being ranked as 9th in a list of the most deprived local authorities in the country.

Over the past year the position had become even more challenging in having to respond from a difficult financial base to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the early stages of the pandemic, as costs spiralled and losses of income escalated, it appeared highly likely that without additional Government support the Council would be unable to manage within the existing resources available, and as such a Section 114 notice was a very real prospect. However over the course of 2020/21, additional funding was provided to assist in meeting the costs of Covid-19 and some of the losses incurred in sales, fees and charges, albeit drip fed through, which alleviated the financial risk as the year progressed.

One of the key reasons that a Section 114 seemed likely was due to the low level of reserves that the Council held; the extreme financial challenges throughout the period of austerity, coupled with the rising demand for services due to high levels of deprivation, had meant that reserves have been utilised in order to deliver services. As at 31st March 2020, when compared to all other 55 Unitary Authorities, Blackburn with Darwen had the 13th lowest level of reserves as a percentage net of revenue expenditure.

Since 2010, in balancing the Council's finances to meet the financial challenges, difficult decisions had been made, and whilst Finance Council approved a balanced budget for 2020/21 and a Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period through to 2022/23 back in February 2020, this was predicated on some very challenging assumptions.

The MTFS approved by Finance Council in February 2020 identified a budget gap of £2.784 million for 2021/22 based on the financial data and demand information available at that time. However as 2020/21 has progressed, the position had developed and the assumptions had been updated due to the impact of the pandemic locally, nationally and globally, and following the release of the Final Local Government Financial Settlement on 10th February 2021.

Details of the movement in the Budget Gap for 2021/22 were set out in the report and reflected changes in funding and income, in cost pressures and key assumptions around inflation and collection rates for Business Rates and Council Tax for example. Some of these variations were recurring and had been carried forward into the baseline of the MTFS for 2022/23 and beyond, however some these were non-recurring, particularly in respect of additional funding, resulting in 'one-off' improvements in the 2021/22 position which would have to be addressed over the

course of the financial year to balance the MTFS going forward through further savings, re-prioritisation of resources and from additional income.

As reported to Finance Council in each of the past 3 years, the MTFS would normally extend for a period of 3 years beyond the end of the budget year, i.e. in this case, through to 2024/25, however given that the Government has only provided a 1 year settlement, and had still not shared proposals for their intended approach for calculating any future local government finance settlements, the future funding arrangements beyond 2021/22 were impossible to plan for with any certainty. Therefore in preparing the MTFS the focus was on the year 2021/22 until more clarity was provided over the next 12 months.

The paper set out the Labour Group's proposed Revenue Budget, Capital Programme and associated Council Tax level for 2021/22 together with the MTFS for the period 2021-2024, based on a review of the existing assumptions and data to reflect the most current information available.

The paper outlined the key national funding issues and cost pressures within portfolios, level of reserves, Medium Term Financial Strategy and Capital Programme 2021-2024

The assumptions made within the budget proposals, which were in line with those made by the Government, were that the Council would increase Council Tax in 2021/22 by 3.99% reflecting;

- 1.99% - general increase in Council Tax to cover increases in the cost of Council services
- 2.00% - to assist it in meeting expenditure on adult social care functions

The proposed revenue Budget Strategy would continue to focus on delivering the Council's priorities and would try to minimise the impact of spending cuts through the delivery of quality efficient and effective services to, and for, the citizens of the Borough, whilst ensuring the Council operated within the financial constraints imposed by central Government.

Following debate, there was a Vote (non-recorded) on Recommendation 2.11 in the report (Council Tax Support Scheme), which was carried, with the Conservative Group abstaining.

There was then a recorded vote on the remainder of the recommendations in the report, with Councillors voting as follows:

FOR

Councillors Afzal, Akhtar H, Akhtar P, Batan, Bateson, Brookfield, Casey, Desai, Fazal, Floyd, Gunn, Harling, Hussain I, Hussain M, Hussain S, Jan-Virman, Kay, Khan M, Khan Z, Khonat, Liddle, Mahmood, McFall, McGurk, Oates, Patel, Rawat,, Riley, Sidat, Shorrocks, Smith D, Smith J, Talbot, Taylor and Whittle.

AGAINST

Councillors Browne, Davies, Rigby C and Rigby J.

ABSTAIN

Councillors Connor, Daley, Gee, Hardman, Marrow, Salton, Slater Ja, Slater Jo, Slater Ju, and Slater N.

RESOLVED – That Finance Council:

Approve the proposals for the Revenue Budget for the financial year 2021/22 as outlined in this report and specifically;

- 2.1 To approve an increase in Council Tax rates of 1.99% (i.e. a weekly increase of £0.60 for Band D Council Tax payers and of £0.40 for Band A Council Tax payers);
- 2.2 To approve an additional increase in Council Tax rates of 2.0% to meet the costs of Adult Social Care, as provided for in central government guidance and the associated calculation of Local Authority Core Spending Power, (i.e. a weekly increase of £0.60 for Band D Council Tax payers and of £0.40 for Band A Council Tax payers);
- 2.3 To note the individual portfolio controllable budgets for 2021/22 as set out in **Appendix A**;
- 2.4 To note the financial risks and uncertainty arising from the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic both within the 2021/22 budget presented, and the MTFS covering the period through to 2024;
- 2.5 To note the significant risks and uncertainty that underpin the assumptions contained within the MTFS for the financial years 2022/23 and 2023/24, due to the lack of information that is yet to be provided by central Government including;
 - the future mechanism for Business Rates Retention,
 - the Fair Funding Review and any resulting redistribution of resource that may follow,
 - the Government's much delayed plans to address the future of social care, which are intrinsically linked to the future plans for the integration of health and adult social care and the potential changes in associated funding streams
- 2.6 To approve the utilisation of the Earmarked Reserves, as detailed in the *Robustness of the 2021/22 Budget and the Recommended Level of Reserves Report*;
- 2.7 To delegate authority for the agreement of hourly rates and contract changes for social care providers for 2021/22, arising from the impact of the increase in the National Living Wage, to the Executive Member for Adult Services and Prevention, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and Governance, the Director of Finance and the Strategic Director for Adults and Health;
- 2.8 To approve the proposals for the Capital Programme for the period 2021-2024 as outlined in **Appendix C** and **Section 8** of this report;
- 2.9 To approve the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021-2024, as per **Appendix D** of this report;
- 2.10 To approve, subject to recommendation **2.1** and **2.2** outlined above, the consequent Council Tax levels detailed in the formal resolution within the report from the Director of Finance;
- 2.11 To agree that the current Local Council Tax Support Scheme remains unchanged for 2021/22 as per section **5.4.3**;
- 2.12 In exercising the flexibility given by central government to increase the premium charge

on empty properties, to note the decision taken at Finance Council in February 2019 to increase the premium charge on empty properties for those which have been vacant for ten years or more to 300% with effect from 1st April 2021;

- 2.13 To approve the Pay Policy Statement prepared in accordance with the requirements of Section 38 of the Localism Act 2011, to have effect for the year 2021/22 unless replaced or varied by the Council, as set out in **Appendix E**.

50 Council Tax 2021/22

A report was submitted on the Council's requirement to set amounts of Council Tax before 11th March in the financial year preceding that for which it was set.

In setting its Council Tax requirement, the Council had to take into account any funding from reserves, income it expected to raise and general funding it would receive from Government as part of the Local Government Finance Settlement. In setting its Council Tax requirement, the Council took into account any funding from reserves, income it expected to raise and general funding it would receive from Government as part of the Local Government Finance Settlement.

The Council was also required to set a basic amount of Council Tax for the financial year 2021/22. The Council Tax was set on the basis of:

- a) The precept on the Collection Fund issued by the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire.
- b) The precept on the Collection Fund issued by the Lancashire Combined Fire Authority.
- c) The Borough Council's precept on the Collection Fund, which is dependent on two factors:
 - (i) Its Council Tax requirement, and (ii) The precepts issued by the seven Parish / Town Councils.

The Council was recommended to approve the draft resolution setting the Council Tax for 2020/21, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report submitted and in also in the Appendix to these Minutes. Following discussion, Finance Council moved to a recorded vote, with Councillors voting as follows:

FOR

Councillors Afzal, Akhtar H, Akhtar P, Batan, Bateson, Brookfield, Casey, Desai, Fazal, Floyd, Gunn, Harling, Hussain I, Hussain M, Hussain S, Jan-Virmani, Kay, Khan M, Khan Z, Khonat, Liddle, Mahmood, McFall, McGurk, Oates, Patel, Rawat, Riley, Sidat, Shorrocks, Smith D, Smith J, Talbot, Taylor and Whittle.

AGAINST

Councillors Browne, Davies, Gee, Rigby C and Rigby J.

ABSTAIN

Councillors Connor, Daley, Hardman, Marrow, Salton, Slater Ja, Slater Jo, Slater Ju, and Slater N.

51 **Constitution Update & Appointment of Section 151 Officer**

Members were asked to approve an update of the Constitution to amend the Scheme of Delegation to Chief Officers reflecting the Policy Council approval of a new Organisational and Departmental Structure and to amend and confirm the delegation of planning powers ensuring that they reflected Council resolutions. Additionally Council was asked to note the resignation of Louise Mattinson, Director of Finance and agree that pending a recruitment process that Denise Park, Chief Executive assume the Section 151 responsibilities.

The Conservative Group voted against the proposals in the report.

RESOLVED -

That Finance Council:

Approve the revisions to the Constitution as set out in this report.

Note the resignation of Louise Mattinson and agree that Denise Park, Chief Executive assume the responsibilities of the Section 151 Officer pending the appointment of a new Director of Finance.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Members referred to the excellent contribution made by Louise Mattinson, and the Leader thanked the Deputy Mayor for his chairing of the meeting and also thanked former Mayor Councillor Iftakhar Hussain.

Signed at a meeting of the Council Forum

on Thursday 25th March 2021

(being the ensuing meeting on the Council) by

MAYOR

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

Draft Council Tax Resolution 2021/22 – Finance Council 1st March 2021

The Council is recommended to resolve as follows:

1. That it be noted that on 12th January 2021, the Council calculated the Council Tax Base for the year 2021/22 in accordance with regulations made under Section 31B(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (the Act):
 - a) 34,938.16 being the Council Tax Base for the whole of the Council area (Item T in the formula in Section 31B of the Act); and
 - b) for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a Parish precept relates, as detailed in Appendix 2.
2. That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2021/22 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
 - a) £399,710,117 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) (a) to (f) of the Act taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils.
 - b) £342,503,255 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) (a) to (d) of the Act.
 - c) £57,206,862 being the amount by which the aggregate at 2 (a) above exceeds the aggregate at 2 (b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act).
 - d) £1,637.37 being the amount at 2 (c) above (Item R) divided by the amount at 1(a) above (Item T), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish precepts).
 - e) £162,658.63 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish precepts) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act (see Appendix 2).
 - f) £1,632.71 Being the amount at 2 (d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 2 (e) above by Item T (1 (a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34 (2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish precept relates.
3. That it be noted that for the year 2021/22 the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Lancashire has issued a precept to the Council, in accordance with

Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as indicated in the tables below, however at the time of writing this report, the precept had yet to be agreed by the PCC (signed week commencing 22nd February 2021).

4. That it be noted that for the year 2021/22 the Lancashire Combined Fire Authority has issued a precept to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as indicated in the tables below, however at the time of writing this report, the precept had yet to be presented to the Lancashire Fire Authority meeting (held on Monday 22nd February 2021).
5. That the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the aggregate amounts shown in the tables below as the amounts of Council Tax for the year 2021/22 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings.

a) Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

<u>Part of the Council's Area</u>	<u>Valuation Bands</u>							
	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>H</u>
Eccleshill Parish	£1,105.81	£1,290.12	£1,474.42	£1,658.72	£2,027.32	£2,395.93	£2,764.53	£3,317.44
Livesey Parish	£1,093.98	£1,276.31	£1,458.64	£1,640.97	£2,005.63	£2,370.29	£2,734.95	£3,281.94
North Turton Parish	£1,100.68	£1,284.13	£1,467.57	£1,651.02	£2,017.91	£2,384.81	£2,751.70	£3,302.04
Pleasington Parish	£1,092.24	£1,274.28	£1,456.32	£1,638.36	£2,002.44	£2,366.52	£2,730.60	£3,276.72
Tockholes Parish	£1,115.09	£1,300.93	£1,486.78	£1,672.63	£2,044.33	£2,416.02	£2,787.72	£3,345.26
Yate and Pickup Bank Parish	£1,103.23	£1,287.10	£1,470.97	£1,654.84	£2,022.58	£2,390.32	£2,758.07	£3,309.68
Darwen Town Council	£1,097.45	£1,280.36	£1,463.27	£1,646.18	£2,012.00	£2,377.82	£2,743.63	£3,292.36
All other parts of the Council's area	£1,088.47	£1,269.89	£1,451.30	£1,632.71	£1,995.53	£2,358.36	£2,721.18	£3,265.42

b) Major Precepting Authorities

<u>Precepting Authority</u>	<u>Valuation Bands</u>							
	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>H</u>
Lancashire Police Authority	£150.97	£176.13	£201.29	£226.45	£276.77	£327.09	£377.42	£452.90
Lancashire Combined Fire Authority	£48.18	£56.21	£64.24	£72.27	£88.33	£104.39	£120.45	£144.54

c) Aggregate Council Tax

<u>Part of the Council's Area</u>	<u>Valuation Bands</u>							
	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>H</u>
Eccleshill Parish	£1,304.96	£1,522.46	£1,739.95	£1,957.44	£2,392.42	£2,827.41	£3,262.40	£3,914.88
Livesey Parish	£1,293.13	£1,508.65	£1,724.17	£1,939.69	£2,370.73	£2,801.77	£3,232.82	£3,879.38
North Turton Parish	£1,299.83	£1,516.47	£1,733.10	£1,949.74	£2,383.01	£2,816.29	£3,249.57	£3,899.48
Pleasington Parish	£1,291.39	£1,506.62	£1,721.85	£1,937.08	£2,367.54	£2,798.00	£3,228.47	£3,874.16
Tockholes Parish	£1,314.24	£1,533.27	£1,752.31	£1,971.35	£2,409.43	£2,847.50	£3,285.59	£3,942.70
Yate and Pickup Bank Parish	£1,302.38	£1,519.44	£1,736.50	£1,953.56	£2,387.68	£2,821.80	£3,255.94	£3,907.12
Darwen Town Council	£1,296.60	£1,512.70	£1,728.80	£1,944.90	£2,377.10	£2,809.30	£3,241.50	£3,889.80
All other parts of the Council's area	£1,287.62	£1,502.23	£1,716.83	£1,931.43	£2,360.63	£2,789.84	£3,219.05	£3,862.86

Town and Parish Council Precepts

	<u>2020/21</u>				<u>2021/22</u>				<u>Council Tax Increase / (Reduction)</u>
<u>Parish / Town Council</u>	<u>Tax Base</u>	<u>Precepts</u>	<u>Grant</u>	<u>Council Tax</u>	<u>Tax Base</u>	<u>Precepts</u>	<u>Grant</u>	<u>Council Tax</u>	<u>Council Tax</u>
				<u>Band D</u>				<u>Band D</u>	<u>Band D</u>
		£	£	£		£	£	£	<u>2021/22 less 2020/21</u>
Eccleshill Parish	95.59	2,429.00	413.50	25.41	93.38	2,429.00	413.50	26.01	0.60
Livesey Parish	2,060.12	17,017.00	1,371.00	8.26	2,086.29	17,233.00	1,371.00	8.26	0.00
North Turton Parish	1,770.04	32,159.00	1,241.00	18.17	1,756.24	32,159.00	1,241.00	18.31	0.14
Pleasington Parish	259.34	1,850.00	0.00	7.13	256.55	1,450.00	0.00	5.65	(1.48)
Tockholes Parish	209.41	7,917.72	146.00	37.81	204.40	8,159.63	146.00	39.92	2.11
Yate and Pickup Bank Parish	141.35	3,128.00	260.00	22.13	141.60	3,133.00	260.00	22.13	0.00
Darwen Town Council	7,541.34	98,095.00	23,905.00	13.01	7,281.78	98,095.00	23,905.00	13.47	0.46
TOTAL / AVERAGE	12,077.19	162,595.72	27,336.50	4.57	11,820.24	162,658.63	27,336.50	4.66	0.09

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA

Members attending a Council, Committee, Board or other meeting with a personal interest in a matter on the Agenda must disclose the existence and nature of the interest and, if it is a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or an Other Interest under paragraph 16.1 of the Code of Conduct, should leave the meeting during discussion and voting on the item.

Members declaring an interest(s) should complete this form and hand it to the Democratic Services Officer at the commencement of the meeting and declare such an interest at the appropriate point on the agenda.

MEETING: **COUNCIL FORUM**

DATE: **25TH MARCH 2021**

AGENDA ITEM NO.:

DESCRIPTION (BRIEF):

NATURE OF INTEREST:

DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY/OTHER (delete as appropriate)

SIGNED :

PRINT NAME:

(Paragraphs 8 to 17 of the Code of Conduct for Members of the Council refer)



REPORT OF:	LEADER
TO:	COUNCIL FORUM
ON:	25th MARCH 2021

COUNCIL RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC – ONE YEAR ON

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the key highlights of the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic over the last 12 months.

Our council website has lots of further information about our response to the pandemic, including our COVID Response Plan and our Key Achievements.

In July 2020 Council Forum received a detailed report on the Council's early critical response to the pandemic and a further update at Policy Council in December 2020

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- a) Council note the content of this report.

3. BACKGROUND

Elected Members will be aware that the in March 2020 restrictions were introduced in England to control the spread of COVID.

The Council activated its Corporate Business Continuity Plan and emergency planning protocols and, through the Lancashire Resilience Forum (LRF), the Council and partners responded to the outbreak at pace, working extremely hard to put in place all of the new measures and guidance expected of us by the Government.

Since the first case in Blackburn with Darwen last March, the Pandemic has seen more than 17,500 positive cases of COVID in the Borough; the highest cumulative rate for any local Authority in the Country.

This has been a frightening and isolating time for many of our residents, council employees and elected Members. Businesses and employers continue to face an uncertain and unprecedented future. As civic leaders, the Council has played a crucial role in delivering essential services whilst continuing our support for communities, faith, voluntary and private sector organisations.

4. RESPONSE HIGHLIGHTS

In November 2020, the Council published its COVID Response Plan outlining some of the core measures in place to assist the Council in responding to the pandemic and preparing for recovery. We also have a number of other strategies that outline our initial priority responses that complement our Local Outbreak Management Plan. All of these are available on our website. We will soon be publishing a more detailed report on Covid – one year on in the Borough.

Throughout the pandemic we have worked with regional convenors, PHE and government departments, highlighting the challenges that Blackburn with Darwen faces, particularly given the high numbers of positive cases in the Borough. We do not yet know the long-term impact of COVID on society from a health, economic or wellbeing perspective. We will continue to lobby the Government directly and raise issues through the national media and trade press, to outline the disproportionate impact COVID will have on areas such as Blackburn with Darwen.

Governance, Leadership and Partnership

As the pandemic began to unfold the council's emergency plans were triggered. These plans provide a set of predefined procedures to follow and provide a framework of considerations to take into account based on legislation, good practice and historic events. The Council worked in partnership with the Lancashire Resilience Forum providing mutual aid and support as we began our response to the emergency.

We quickly introduced a number of internal groups and cells with a direct link to the Chief Executive and Elected Members, including a Local Outbreak Engagement Board, Incident Management Hub, education response cell, adult social care response cell as well as a core COVID team to co-ordinate the response. We have worked closely with colleagues elsewhere in local government, health, police, BID, community groups, faith settings and the private sector.

The COVID response plan on the Council website provides a high level outline of the governance and partnership frameworks we have been working within.

Adapting our services

On 16th March 2020, and in line with Government guidance, we advised our employees to work from home if they were able to. Over the following days services began to pause or move on-line as further restrictions were introduced.

We quickly accelerated digital support to employees and moved meetings on-line. Our office-based services have continued throughout with large numbers of staff moving to home-working or a blend of office/home working. Our staff have been flexible and adaptable responding to change at pace, providing 24/7 service where needed.

Many employees have redeployed into different roles to support critical areas as some services paused, or have refocused duties to response to the pandemic.

To support vulnerable groups, our children's and adults support had to work differently, finding new ways to engage with young people and families such as virtual visits walks and bike rides. We also quickly established an Education Response Team, supporting our education establishments as they respond to the pandemic and also manage covid-19 outbreaks. Our schools have been fantastic in supporting young people to remain in a school setting where possible.

Our residents and communities have embraced on-line engagement. We have hosted a range of virtual events and award ceremonies; our Council meetings are now on-line; our libraries moved to click and collect when closed; fitness sessions and activities have been on-line; and we have created a Blackburn Museum YouTube page and also posting pictures of collections over social media. Our registrar services accepted registrations on-line or by phones and we have also conducted citizenship ceremonies via Microsoft Teams.

Many of our services have continued as business as usual, with some adaptations to enable social distancing, such as burials with funeral services streamed live from Pleasington Crematorium; waste collection has continued throughout and we have adapted our household waste recycling centres to enable social distancing. Our planning service and building control has remained open with COVID secure measures in place for site inspections.

All of our workplaces and council buildings are COVID-secure and include additional cleaning and sanitisation, protective screen, social distancing measures and access to PPE where needed.

Using Data

Data, analytics and epidemiological analysis is fundamental in our approach to understanding the spread of COVID. We use it to inform the development of strategies and measures for local restrictions, outbreak management and communication with our communities. We have used a wide range of data from key Public Health England (PHE) sources to inform our approach.

Since the start of the pandemic, we have developed a suite of reporting mechanisms that include website publication, daily reports, dashboards and a series of specifically commissioned reports and studies. Data is published on our website and we also produce a weekly user-friendly dashboard of key statistics published on our social media channels.

Testing programme

Blackburn with Darwen has led the way in testing. We had the first Local Testing Site (LTS) in Lancashire and introduced early community and workplace testing programmes.

The Community Testing Team was introduced for a four-week pilot, and located in wards with the highest positive cases per area. The Teams worked on foot knocking on doors and engaging with residents about the importance of getting tested and providing home testing kits. During the pilot a total of 2862 test kits were distributed to residents.

We have led on local test and trace to support the national system and been successful at drawing in resources to increase local testing with the Regional Testing Centre at Blackburn Hospital, two Mobile Testing Units and two Local Testing Units in Blackburn and Darwen providing significant local testing capacity.

At the peak of our capacity we could undertake upto 2500 tests per day.

As the Government rolled out SMART testing, we have been working with businesses to undertake workplace testing. Our dedicated COVID website has lots of useful information on workplace testing and the testing team are available to provide advice and support and guide businesses through the programme.

Contact Tracing local programme

Creating an effective contact tracing system to break the chains of transmission has been a crucial element of the Council's COVID-19 response. In July 2020, we introduced a local enhanced contact tracing service to complement the national system. We integrated staff across neighbourhood engagement and wellbeing services to support the service. This cross department team has the invaluable local knowledge and experience of supporting individuals' health and wellbeing.

As at 16 March 2021, 3366 cases have passed from the national team to the Council contact tracing team.

Supporting residents

In addition to our usual services to support all residents, in March 2020 we quickly launched the Blackburn with Darwen Help Hub. It has, and continues to be, a valuable lifeline to many of our residents. Since its launch, the Help Hub has provided a range of support for residents such as organising delivery of food and essential supplies, providing information and advice, regular phone calls and befrienders and more recently co-ordinating support to enable people to travel to receive their vaccine.

At the height of the first lockdown the Help Hub co-ordinated delivery of over 1000 meals each week in partnership with 150 organisations which formed the VCFS Crisis Food Group. We received tremendous feedback from users of the Help Hub. So far, throughout the pandemic 4632 people have been supported by the Help Hub.

Volunteering has played a huge part in our support to residents. We already had a successful volunteer programme in the Borough and the COVID-19 pandemic has brought out the best in our communities who have been eager to support each other. Over 50 residents, across a range of age-groups, have signed up to be telephone befriender volunteers since March 2020. Volunteers are also supporting the vaccination programme.

Our care homes and residents have also received additional support with daily welfare calls, PPE, infection control support.

Our website contains lots of useful information on the support available to residents including financial support, wellbeing and of course the HelpHub.

Residents can also access the self-isolation support payment on-line. At 16th March 2021, we had processed 1270 isolation grant claims and paid £623,836 in support grants through the scheme.

Supporting businesses and workplaces

The extended restrictions placed on businesses in the Borough has taken its toll, particularly on the leisure and hospitality sector. Throughout the pandemic our health and safety team and public protection team offer guidance and support to workplaces, including faith settings, and support for businesses to reopen safely and be COVID-secure. This support is available through a combination of site visits, telephone and online support.

We have provided resource packs for businesses, which includes posters, leaflets, templates and best practice tips. The guidance and legislation from the Government has often been confusing and our legal team have been on hand to support businesses in understanding the restrictions.

Customer services and our business team have guided businesses through the complex business grant system introduced by the Government. To date we have paid out £60,543,105 in grants to our businesses and with payments continuing to be made. We have also provided on-line Q&A sessions with business experts for our businesses.

In March 2021, we launched our Taxi Driver COVID-19 grant with a one-off grant payment of £500 to taxi drivers who have continued to operate but are affected by the on-going restrictions. The council has recognised that restrictions on travel, as well as closure of many venues across the hospitality and leisure sectors, has reduced overall demand for taxi services.

As referenced elsewhere in this report, all of our businesses and workplaces have access to the national and local testing programme and our officers are on hand to guide them through the process.

We will of course continue to press the Government for support to our businesses, particularly those who have been hit hard by the extended restrictions in the Borough.

Vaccination programme

The vaccination programme has provided great hope for overcoming the worst effects of COVID-19 and has been progressing effectively through the most vulnerable groups starting with Care Home Residents and carers down the age groups based on age and level of vulnerability.

Whilst this is an NHS programme, we have been working closely with health colleagues to facilitate the vaccination centres in the Borough, providing marshalling at the sites and

also setting up the Cathedral Crypt as a national vaccination centre. More than 45,000 residents have now received their first vaccination.

However, despite these overall high levels of vaccine uptake, there are signs of lower vaccine uptake in lower income and some ethnic minority groups. Our community connectors will be working in communities and with some groups to increase uptake where there is hesitancy, and also to understand the barriers for having the vaccine, for some members of the community.

Keeping people informed

Effective communications has been a priority from day one and continues to play a key role. We have kept our employees, communities, businesses, media and other partners up-to-date with key government guidance, advice and information about changes to our services and the support available.

Given the high number of positive cases in some wards we have undertaken targeted communications and engagement in those areas across a range of media platforms. This has included radio, social media, leaflets, ad-van and also through our community groups and with faith sector partners.

We have launched a number of campaigns such as 'Picture This' to promote compliance with restrictions as a route to returning to 'normal life' as quickly as possible. Partners, local celebrities, business owners, headteachers, NHS staff and more have all taken part in the campaign.

We have produced a series of videos, infographics and stories throughout the pandemic outlining the support available, where to access information, latest data, case studies, local stories and up-to-date guidance which are shared with our residents and businesses through a range of platforms.

Pandemic progress

The first positive case in the Borough was on 13th March 2020 and in the last 12 months there have been more than 17,500 total cases. It's worth noting that in the first wave, testing only took place on people that had been hospitalised so it's likely that there were huge underestimates on figures in the early part of the pandemic.

The pandemic has put a great strain on hospitals with high numbers of COVID inpatients. To date 446 of people have unfortunately lost their lives in the borough, and mortality in 2020 was significantly higher than in the previous three years. This pattern is reflected nationally.

5. SAFE BWD AND THE NEW NORMAL

As we move into the second year of the Pandemic there will continue to be positive cases in the borough and it is almost certain that there will continue to be new strains and variants of the disease that emerge from all over the globe.

The range of Vaccines will grow and as we begin to understand their effects we will be able to utilise them as protection for individuals and as a control measure for the spread of the virus.

As infection numbers come down, the importance of effective local test and trace will increase and the addition of backwards tracing will be able to improve the ways in which we are able to manage incidents and outbreaks. COVID is a global phenomenon and as the UK begins to move out of the third national lockdown, it will be important to understand the continuing risks to local citizens, communities and business.

In February 2021, the Government published its four stage process to move out of the third national lockdown with the intention for this to be the final roadmap. To complement the roadmap, we are developing our own reopening plans to support our residents, businesses and workplaces to move forward as we live alongside COVID. We all want to get back to doing the things we love in a safe, secure environment.

We are updating our business plans to reflect the restart of services that have paused, and continue to offer a hybrid of face-to-face and on-line services where these have worked well during the restrictions. We want our residents, businesses and communities to access the broad range of services in a way that best suits their needs as we move to recovery.

We are refreshing our Corporate Plan priorities to reflect the new normal and embrace the unprecedented acceleration of digital over the last 12 months.

The local elections will go ahead in May 2021 and our election team are making preparations for these to be conducted in a safe and secure manner, both at polling stations and the count. This includes social distancing measures, one-way system, hand sanitisers, and the need for wearing face coverings. Candidates have also been issued with information on campaigning safely.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

We will continue to monitor government advice and guidance and tailor any policy requirements as necessary.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There have been, and will continue to be significant financial implications in our response to COVID-19. Reports to Finance Council and Executive Board provide further information. We will continue to work with lobbying groups to press the Government for additional resource and financial support.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council must ensure that it fully complies with the various Coronavirus legislation and Government guidance introduced from time to time, in respect of all its services, powers and duties. The Council must also continuously monitor the changes in legislation and guidance, to ensure the provision of its statutory and other responsibilities.

9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Please refer to section 7. Financial implications, in this report.

10. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

Analysis to capture the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on equality groups and the Council's actions to mitigate these impacts is being undertaken and updated as the pandemic progresses. The analysis is being supported by partners from across the public sector.

11. CONSULTATIONS

No consultations have taken place.

Background papers: Please refer to previous reports to Council Forum and Policy Council and extensive resource on the council website – www.blackburn.gov.uk/coronavirus

Contact Officer: Denise Park, Chief Executive

Date: 17/03/2021

REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE.

Councillors Saima Afzal

PORTFOLIO COORDINATING

DIRECTOR: David Fairclough

This report updates the Council Forum on the work of the Standards Committee.

Committee on Standards in Public Life - Local Government Ethical Standards.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life made a number of recommendations in their January 2019 report on local government ethical standards. In that report, they identified some best practice recommendations which represent a benchmark for ethical practice and which they expect any local authority should implement. The Standards Committee reviewed the recommendations made and as set out in the Appendices to this report considered these, against the current Code of Conduct and Constitution and also considered the option of adopting the latest Model Code of Conduct produced by the LGA.

After considering the options the Standards Committee unanimously recommended to the Council Forum

- 1) Adopt the 15 best practice recommendations which the Committee on Standards in Public Life consider represent a benchmark for ethical practice and which they expect any local authority should implement (Appendix A).

Then subject to 1) above agree the Full Council:

- 2) Update the local *Code of Conduct* and update the local *Arrangements for dealing with Complaints about the Code of Conduct for Members* to reflect the Committee on Standards in Public Life best practice recommendations as set out in both documents referenced in Appendix B;
- 3) That Best Practice Recommendation 5 – continue to apply annually for administrative effectiveness and efficiency.
- 4) That Best Practice Recommendation 15 – be applied on an annual basis with Group Leaders.

Councillor Saima Afzal
Chair of Standards Committee

March 2021

Appendix A

List of Best Practice Recommendations

Best practice 1: Local authorities should include prohibitions on bullying and harassment in codes of conduct. These should include a definition of bullying and harassment, supplemented with a list of examples of the sort of behaviour covered by such a definition.

Comments

Although our Code currently includes prohibitions on bullying and harassment, it only includes the definitions in the recently approved Member to Member code. It is suggested this be addressed by inclusion also in Part 1. (Part 1 Paragraph 3 refers).

Best practice 2: Councils should include provisions in their code of conduct requiring councillors to comply with any formal standards investigation, and prohibiting trivial or malicious allegations by councillors.

Comments

Although co-operation and engagement are currently implied it is suggested that the Code be amended with an explicit clause suggested in Paragraph 6.3 of the Arrangements for dealing with complaints about the Code of Conduct for Members.

As regards trivial complaints, this is primarily currently dealt with in paragraph 3.2 of the Arrangements for dealing with complaints about the Code of Conduct for Members. It is felt the addition of the word “trivial” would be appropriate.

Best practice 3: Principal authorities should review their code of conduct each year and regularly seek, where possible, the views of the public, community organisations and neighbouring authorities.

Comments

The Code is regularly discussed and reviewed by the Standards Committee although it is not regularly reviewed by the Public or alongside that of other neighbouring authorities. The Committee is asked to consider if an annual report on complaints received and responded to, summarising the regular written and published reports made to the Committee by the Monitoring Officer, be published separately each year. This would also invite any comments on the Code to be sent in by a date prior to the first meeting of the Standards Committee each municipal year for the Standards Committee to review any comments received.

Best practice 4: An authority’s code should be readily accessible to both councillors and the public, in a prominent position on a council’s website and available in council premises.

Comments

The Committee is invited to agree that the Code be prominently displayed in both Town Halls and simplified and prominent link be included on the Councils website.

Best practice 5: Local authorities should update their gifts and hospitality register at least once per quarter, and publish it in an accessible format, such as CSV.

Comments

The Committee is invited to consider this recommendation and determine if our current practice of an annual update is more administratively efficient or whether the recommendation should be adopted to support transparency more readily accessible.

Best practice 6: Councils should publish a clear and straightforward public interest test against which allegations are filtered.

Comments

This is covered currently by paragraph 3.2 of the current Arrangements for dealing with complaints about the Code of Conduct for Members. Members are invited to re-consider the 7 bullet points which in effect help define the public interest test. It is recommended that subject to those considerations bullet point 3 be moved to become bullet point 7 and the summary points separated so that the flow of considerations is more consistent.

Best practice 7: Local authorities should have access to at least two Independent Persons.

Comments

The Council for the last 4 years has had 2 Independent Persons and recruitment to maintain this position is under way.

Best practice 8: An Independent Person should be consulted as to whether to undertake a formal investigation on an allegation, and should be given the option to review and comment on allegations which the responsible officer is minded to dismiss as being without merit, vexatious, or trivial.

Comments

This is the Council's current practice reflected in the current Arrangements for dealing with complaints about the Code of Conduct for Members.

Best practice 9: Where a local authority makes a decision on an allegation of misconduct following a formal investigation, a decision notice should be published as soon as possible on its website, including a brief statement of facts, the provisions of the code engaged by the allegations, the view of the Independent Person, the reasoning of the decision-maker, and any sanction applied.

Comments

This is the Council's current practice however this is not currently reflected in the Arrangements for dealing with complaints about the Code of Conduct for Members. A proposed new paragraph 14 is suggested for the Committee's consideration and approval.

Best practice 10: A local authority should have straightforward and accessible guidance on its website on how to make a complaint under the code of conduct, the process for handling complaints, and estimated timescales for investigations and outcomes.

Comments

Access to the Members Complaints process has been improved over the summer via link from the general 'Complaints' page on the Council's website. The 'Arrangements for dealing with complaints about the Code of Conduct for Members' provide all the detail about timescales and process and are issued to all complainants in full when they make a complaint. The Committee may consider that this document in addition should be shown separately via link on the website.

Best practice 11: Formal standards complaints about the conduct of a parish councillor towards a clerk should be made by the chair or by the parish council as a whole, rather than the clerk in all but exceptional circumstances.

Comments

This is not specifically referenced in the current Arrangements for dealing with complaints about the Code of Conduct for Members. A suggested paragraph is proposed as 2.3 should the Committee consider this should be adopted.

Best practice 12: Monitoring Officers' roles should include providing advice, support and management of investigations and adjudications on alleged breaches to parish councils within the remit of the principal authority. They should be provided with adequate training, corporate support and resources to undertake this work.

Comments

This has been the position for some although there have not been significant numbers of Parish Council complaints. There would in the current climate be issues of the availability of resources should this position change. The Committee are asked to note the position.

Best practice 13: A local authority should have procedures in place to address any conflicts of interest when undertaking a standards investigation. Possible steps should include asking the Monitoring Officer from a different authority to undertake the investigation.

Comments

This is the position currently although the reference in paragraph 6.1 it is suggested could be strengthened. The Committee are asked to approve the update.

Best practice 14: Councils should report on separate bodies they have set up or which they own as part of their annual governance statement, and give a full picture of their relationship with those bodies. Separate bodies created by local authorities should abide by the Nolan principle of openness, and publish their board agendas and minutes and annual reports in an accessible place.

Comments

This is the position currently.

Best practice 15: Senior officers should meet regularly with political group leaders or group whips to discuss standards issues.

Comments

This is not the position currently and matters are only raised by incident. The views of the Committee and their recommendation is sought by the Monitoring Officer.

Appendix B

Section 1 Members Code of Conduct

Code of Conduct for Members and Guidance

1. Introduction

The Council is determined to provide excellent local government for the people of the Borough. It promotes and maintains high standards of conduct by Members and Co-opted Members and has adopted a Code of Conduct for Members, in line with its obligations under section 27(2) of the Localism Act 2011. To help Members understand their conduct responsibilities, they should make sure they read and understand the General Principles below

2. General Principles of Conduct for Members and Co-opted Members

Members and co-opted Members must behave according to the highest standards of personal conduct in everything they do as a Member. In particular, they must observe the following principles of conduct, some of which are set out in law.

2.1 Selflessness

Members should serve only the public interest and should never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person.

2.2 Honesty and Integrity

Members should not place themselves in situations where their honesty and integrity may be questioned, should not behave improperly and should on all occasions avoid the appearance of such behaviour.

2.3 Objectivity

Members should make decisions on merit, including when making appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards or benefits.

2.4 Accountability

Members should be accountable to the public for their actions and the manner in which they carry out their responsibilities, and should co-operate fully and honestly with any scrutiny appropriate to their particular office.

2.5 Openness

Members should be as open as possible about their actions and those of their authority, and should be prepared to give reasons for those actions.

2.6 Personal Judgement

Members may take account of the views of others, including their political groups, but should reach their own conclusions on the issues before them and act in accordance with those conclusions.

2.7 Respect for Others

Members should promote equality by not discriminating unlawfully against any person, and by treating people with respect, regardless of their race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability. They should respect the impartiality and integrity of the authority's statutory officers, and its other employees.

2.8 Duty to Uphold the Law

Members should uphold the law and, on all occasions, act in accordance with the trust that the public is entitled to place in them.

2.9 Stewardship

Members should do whatever they are able to do to ensure that their authorities use their resources prudently and in accordance with the law.

2.10 Leadership

Members should promote and support these principles by leadership, and by example, and should act in a way that secures or preserves public confidence.

3. Training

Each Member must attend annual training on the Code of Conduct/ethical standards, in addition to any current requirements to receive training for specific Committees, for example Planning & Highways or Licensing Committees.

THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Part 1

GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. Introduction and interpretation

- 1.1 This Code applies to you as a member of the Council.
- 1.2 It is your responsibility to comply with this Code. Failure to do so may result in a sanction being applied by the Council. Failure to take appropriate action in respect of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest may result in a criminal conviction and a fine of up to £5,000 and /or disqualification from office for a period of up to 5 years.
- 1.3 In this Code: -
 - 1.3.1 “meeting” means any meeting of:
 - (a) the Council;
 - (b) any of the Council’s committees or sub-committees, joint committees or joint sub-committees;
 - 1.3.2 “member” includes a co-opted member and an appointed member.

2. Scope

- 2.1 The Code of Conduct applies to applies to you:
 - (a) Whenever you act in your official capacity, including whenever you conduct the business of your authority or act, claim to act or give the impression you are acting, in your official capacity or as a representative of your authority;
 - (b) At any time, where your conduct has led to a criminal conviction. However, the Code of Conduct does not apply to your private life.
- 2.2 Where you act as a representative of the Council—
 - (a) on another relevant authority, you must, when acting for that other authority, comply with that other authority’s code of conduct; or
 - (b) on any other body, you must, when acting for that other body, comply with this Code, except and insofar as it conflicts with any other lawful obligations to which that other body may be subject.

3. General obligations

- 3.1 You must not:
 - (a) do anything which may knowingly cause your authority to breach the Equality Act 2010;
 - (b) bully, **harass** or be abusive to any person;

- (c) intimidate or attempt to intimidate any person who is or is likely to be:
 - (i) a complainant,
 - (ii) a witness, or
 - (iii) involved in the administration of any investigation or proceedings, in relation to an allegation that a member (including yourself) has failed to comply with his or her authority's code of conduct; or
- (d) do anything which compromises or is likely to compromise the impartiality of those who work for, or on behalf of, the Council.

Definitions and Examples

Bullying is a particular form of harassment and may be characterised as persistent, offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, possibly through an abuse or misuse of position or power where the intention or outcome is to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient. Examples of bullying include: shouting at others in public or in private; personal insults; ignoring or excluding individuals; persistent, excessive, unfair or unjustified criticism; setting impossible deadlines or targets/objectives or making inconsistent demands. This list is not exhaustive.

Harassment is, in general terms, unwanted, unreasonable and offensive conduct affecting the dignity of the individual. It includes verbal, non-verbal and physical conduct that may be related to age, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief, nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident. Examples of harassment include: unwanted physical contact, offensive jokes or banter, offensive emails, pictures or graffiti, unwelcome sexual advances, exclusion and victimisation. This list is not exhaustive.

Victimisation is treating someone less favourably than others because the individual has, in good faith, complained (whether formally or otherwise) that someone has been bullying or harassing them or someone else, or supported someone to make a complaint or given evidence in relation to a complaint. Examples include: Isolating someone because the individual has made a complaint or treating them differently.

4. You must not:

- (a) disclose information given to you in confidence by anyone, or information acquired by you which you believe, or ought reasonably to be aware, is of a confidential nature, except where:
 - (i) you have the consent of a person authorised to give it;
 - (ii) you are required by law to do so;
 - (iii) the disclosure is made to a third party for the purpose of obtaining professional advice provided that the third party agrees not to disclose the information to any other person; or
 - (iv) the disclosure is:
 - (a) reasonable and in the public interest; and

- (b) made in good faith and in compliance with the reasonable requirements of the Council; or
- (b) prevent another person from gaining access to information to which that person is entitled by law.
- 5. You must not conduct yourself in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing your office or the Council into disrepute.
- 6. You:
 - (a) must not use or attempt to use your position as a member improperly to confer on or secure for yourself or any other person, an advantage or disadvantage; and
 - (b) must, when using or authorising the use by others of the resources of your authority:
 - (i) act in accordance with the Council's reasonable requirements; and
 - (ii) ensure that such resources are not used improperly for political purposes (including party political purposes); and
 - (c) must have regard to any applicable Local Authority Code of Publicity made under the Local Government Act 1986.
- 7. (1) When reaching decisions on any matter you must have regard to any relevant advice provided to you by
 - (a) The Council's chief finance officer; or
 - (b) The Council's monitoring officer,

where that officer is acting pursuant to his or her personal statutory duties.

(2) You must give reasons for all decisions in accordance with any statutory requirements and any reasonable additional requirements imposed by your authority.

Part 2

DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

- 8. Disclosable Pecuniary Interests" are defined from time to time by the Secretary of State in Regulations. The Regulations current at the time of adoption of this Code are The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012 and are set out below.

A 'disclosable Pecuniary Interest' is an interest of yourself or your partner (which means spouse or civil partner, a person with whom you are living as husband or wife, or a person with whom you are living as if you are civil partners) within the following descriptions:

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Prescribed description</i>
Employment, office, trade, profession or vacation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.

Sponsorship	<p>Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the relevant authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by M in carrying out duties as a member, or towards the election expenses of M.</p> <p>This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.</p>
Contracts	<p>Any contract which is made between the relevant person (or a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest) and the relevant authority—</p> <p>(a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and</p> <p>(b) which has not been fully discharged.</p>
Land	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the relevant authority.
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the relevant authority for a month or longer.
Corporate tenancies	<p>Any tenancy where (to M's knowledge)—</p> <p>(a) the landlord is the relevant authority; and</p> <p>(b) the tenant is a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest.</p>
Securities	<p>Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where—</p> <p>(a) that body (to M's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the relevant authority; and</p> <p>(b) either—</p> <p>(i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or</p> <p>(ii) if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.</p>

Definitions

“the Act” means the Localism Act 2011;

“body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest” means a firm in which the relevant person is a partner or a body corporate of which the relevant person is a director, or in the securities of which the relevant person has a beneficial interest;

“director” includes a member of the committee of management of an industrial and provident society;

“land” excludes an easement, servitude, interest or right in or over land which does not carry with it a right for the relevant person (alone or jointly with another) to occupy the land or to receive income;

“M” means a member of a relevant authority;

“meeting” means any meeting of the Council, the Executive, any of the Council’s or Executive’s committees, sub-committees, joint committees, joint sub-committees, or area committees.

“member” includes a co-opted member;

“relevant authority” means the authority of which M is a member;

“relevant period” means the period of 12 months ending with the day on which M gives a notification for the purposes of section 30(1) or section 31(7), as the case may be, of the Act;

“relevant person” means M or any other person referred to in section 30(3)(b) of the Act;

“securities” means shares, debentures, debenture stock, loan stock, bonds, units of a collective investment scheme within the meaning of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and other securities of any description, other than money deposited with a building society.

9. Registering and declaring Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

- 9.1 You must, within 28 days of your election or appointment to office as a member or co-opted member notify the Council’s Monitoring officer of any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests you have (see paragraph 8 above)
- 9.2 You must, notify the Council’s Monitoring Officer within 28 days of becoming aware of any changes to a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest previously notified or of any new Disclosable Pecuniary Interest not previously notified, and provide an update to the Monitoring Officer once every 12 months.
- 9.3 If a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, has not been entered onto the Council’s register, then the member or co-opted member must disclose the interest to any meeting of the Council at which they are present, where they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest and where the matter is not a “sensitive interest”.
- 9.4 Following disclosure of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest not on the Council’s register or the subject of pending notification, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest within 28 days beginning with the date of disclosure.
- 9.5 Unless dispensation has been granted, you may not participate in any discussion of, vote on, or discharge any function related to any matter in which you have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest.
- 9.6 Any interests notified to the Monitoring Officer will be included in the register of interests. A copy of the register will be available for public inspection and will be published on the authority’s website

10 Sensitive Interests

Where you consider that disclosure of the details of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest could lead to you, or a person connected with you, being subject to violence or intimidation, and the Monitoring Officer agrees, if the interest is entered on the register, copies of the register that are made available for inspection and any published version of the register will exclude details of the interest, but may state that you have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, the details of which are withheld under Section 32(2) of the Localism Act 2011

11 Effect of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests on Participation

11.1 If you are present at a meeting of the authority and you have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter to be considered or being considered at the meeting:

- (a) You may not participate in any discussion of the matter at the meeting.
- (b) You may not participate in any vote taken on the matter at the meeting.
- (c) If the interest is not registered, you must disclose the interest to the meeting.
- (d) If the interest is not registered and is not the subject matter of a pending notification, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest within 28 days.

Note: In addition the Council Procedure Rules require you to leave the room where the meeting is held while any discussion or voting takes place

11.2 Where an Executive Member discharging a function alone and becomes aware of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in a matter being dealt with or to be dealt with by him/her, the Executive Member must notify the Monitoring Officer of the Interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter

12 Dispensations

The authority may grant you a dispensation, but only in limited circumstances, to enable you to participate and vote on a matter on which you have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest

13 Offences

It is a criminal offence to:

- Fail to notify the Monitoring Officer of any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest within 28 days of election
- Fail to disclose a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest at a meeting if it is not on the register
- Fail to notify the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest that is not on the register that you have disclosed to a meeting
- Participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which you have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest
- As an Executive Member discharging a function, acting alone, and having a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in such a matter, failing to notify the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of the interest.
- Knowingly or recklessly providing information that is false or misleading in notifying the Monitoring Officer of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or in disclosing such interest to a meeting.

The criminal penalties available to a court are to impose a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale and disqualification from being a councillor for up to 5 years.

Part 3

OTHER INTERESTS

14 Notification of Other Interests

- 14.1 In addition to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests you must, within 28 days of your election or appointment to office as a member or co-opted member notify the Monitoring Officer in writing of details of your interests within the following categories, for inclusion in the register of interests:
- (a) Details of any body of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management to which you are appointed or nominated by your authority;
 - (b) Details of any body exercising functions of a public nature, any body directed to charitable purposes or any body one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union), of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management;
 - (c) Details of any gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £25 that you have received in connection with your role as a member of the Council, and details of the donor
- 14.2 You must, within 28 days of becoming aware of any new interest or change to any interest registered under this paragraph notify the Monitoring Officer of the details of that new interest or change.
- 14.3 Any interests notified to the Monitoring Officer will be included in the register of interests. A copy of the register will be available for public inspection and will be published on the authority's website.
- 14.4 Where a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest is notified to the Monitoring Officer under Part 2, paragraph 9 above it need not be separately notified or separately registered again as an interest under this Part 3 of the Code.

15 Disclosure of Other Interests

- 15.1 Subject to 15.2 to 15.5, where you have an interest described in paragraph 14 above or in 15.2 below in any business of your authority, and where you are aware or ought reasonably to be aware of the existence of that interest, and you attend a meeting of your authority at which the business is considered, you must disclose to that meeting the existence and nature of that interest at the commencement of that consideration, or when the interest becomes apparent.
- 15.2 You have an interest in any business of your authority where a decision in relation to that business might reasonably be regarded as affecting your well-being or financial position or the well-being or financial position of a member of your family or any person with whom you have a close association.
- 15.3 Where you have an interest in any business of the authority of the type mentioned in paragraph 14(c), (gifts and hospitality) you need not disclose the nature or existence of that interest to the meeting if the interest was registered more than three years before the date of the meeting.

- 15.4 Where you have an interest by virtue of paragraph 14 but, by virtue of paragraph 17 below, (Sensitive interests) relating to it is not registered in the register of members' interests, you must indicate to the meeting that you have an interest, but need not disclose the sensitive information to the meeting.
- 15.5 Where you have an interest in any business of your authority by virtue of paragraph 14 or 15.2, and you have made an Executive Decision in relation to that business, you must ensure that any written statement of that decision records the existence and nature of that interest.

16 Non participation in case of certain other interests

- 16.1 Where you have an interest in any business of your authority by virtue of paragraph 14 or 15.2 **AND** the interest is one which a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice your judgment of the public interest **AND** where that business:
- (a) affects your financial position or the financial position of a person or body through whom the interest arises; or
 - (b) relates to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to you or any person through whom the interest arises,
- you may not participate in any discussion of the matter at the meeting, and you may not participate in any vote taken on the matter at the meeting.

Note: In addition, the Council Procedure Rules require you to leave the room where the meeting is held while any discussion or voting takes place.

- 16.2 Where you have an interest in any business of your authority to which paragraph 16.1 applies, you may attend a meeting but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence relating to the business, provided that the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose, whether under a statutory right or otherwise, and provided that you leave the room where the meeting is held immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence.
- 16.3 Subject to you disclosing the interest at the meeting, you may attend a meeting and vote on a matter where you have an interest under paragraph 16.1 that relates to the functions of your authority in respect of:
- (a) housing, where you are a tenant of your authority provided that those functions do not relate particularly to your tenancy or lease;
 - (b) an allowance, payment or indemnity given to members;
 - (c) any ceremonial honour given to members; and
 - (d) setting council tax or a precept under the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- 16.4 Where, as an Executive Member, you may discharge a function alone, and you become aware of an interest under paragraph 16.1 in a matter being dealt with, or to be dealt with by you, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter, or seek improperly to influence a decision about the matter.

17 Sensitive interests

Where you consider that disclosure of the details of an interest could lead to you, or a person connected with you, being subject to violence or intimidation, and the Monitoring Officer agrees, if the interest is entered on the register, copies of the register that are made available for inspection and any published version of the register will exclude details of the interest, but may state that you have an interest, the details of which are withheld.

BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Protocol on Member to Member Relations

Councillors at all times must promote and maintain high standards and adopted a Code of Conduct for Members in line with its obligations under section 27(2) of the Localism Act 2011. Members and co-opted members must behave according to the highest standards for personal conduct in everything they do as a Member. In particular they must observe the following 10 principles of conduct as set out in the Code of Conduct, some of which are set out in law:

Selflessness, Honesty & Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Personal Judgement, Respect of others, Duty to uphold the law, Stewardship and Leadership

The Code of Conduct makes it clear that “*Members should promote equality by not discriminating unlawfully against any person, and by treating people with respect, regardless of their race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability*” (Respect for others). This applies to all circumstances including working with other councillors.

All councillors have a responsibility to behave in a way that is not offensive to others and to acknowledge that views and opinions held by other councillors may not always coincide with their own. Such differences being expressed are unlikely to constitute harassment. The Code is therefore not intended to deter from robust political argument and debate, but it does expect that all councillors conduct themselves in accordance with these 10 principles at all times, certainly avoiding any behaviours which could be deemed as bullying, harassing or victimising, in any way.

In this context councillors are responsible for being aware of and understanding the following definitions*:

Bullying is a particular form of harassment and may be characterised as persistent, offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, possibly through an abuse or misuse of position or power where the intention or outcome is to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient. Examples of bullying include: shouting at others in public or in private; personal insults; ignoring or excluding individuals; persistent, excessive, unfair or unjustified criticism; setting impossible deadlines or targets/objectives or making inconsistent demands. This list is not exhaustive.

Harassment is, in general terms, unwanted, unreasonable and offensive conduct affecting the dignity of the individual. It includes verbal, non-verbal and physical conduct that may be related to age, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief, nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident. Examples of harassment include: unwanted physical contact, offensive jokes or banter, offensive emails, pictures or graffiti, unwelcome sexual advances, exclusion and victimisation. This list is not exhaustive.

Victimisation is treating someone less favourably than others because the individual has, in good faith, complained (whether formally or otherwise) that someone has been bullying or harassing them or someone else, or supported someone to make a complaint or given evidence in relation to a complaint. Examples include: Isolating someone because the individual has made a complaint or treating them differently.

Councillors can therefore expect of other Councillors:

- To represent their wards effectively and efficiently
- To strive to do their best for their Wards and constituents of the Borough
- To behave in a manner which accords with the Code of Conduct for Members
- To be respectful and courteous
- To respond to enquiries fairly and efficiently
- To act lawfully and to maintain confidentiality when appropriate to do so
- To maintain confidentiality where it is appropriate to do so
- To have regards to social hours regarding contact
- To consider information for the purpose of making informed judgements
- To treat all councillors in a reasonable manner
- Not to make any inappropriate comment towards another councillor, which could be interpreted as discriminatory, demeaning, abusive or bullying.
- Not to ask Councillor's to breach council policy or procedures, or to act unlawfully
- Not to exert undue influence or pressure, or request special treatment for councillor's friends or family members.
- Not to request unauthorised access to resources or information held by the council
- Not to breach confidentiality and disclose any personal/private information about another councillor

Failure to follow the Protocol

Any complaint alleging failure to follow this Protocol would be considered under the '*Arrangements for dealing with complaints about the Code of Conduct for Members*'.

Training*

Mandatory training for all Councillors will be provided annually to help support elected Members in understanding equalities, inclusivity and what behaviours may amount to discriminatory behaviour.

BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Arrangements for dealing with complaints about the Code of Conduct for Members

1. Introduction

- 1.1 These “Arrangements” are made under section 28 of the Localism Act 2011 and set out how you may make a complaint that a Member, Co-opted Member, Parish or Town Council Member has or may have failed to comply with the Code of Conduct for Members (Appendix 1), and sets out how Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council (“the Council”) will deal with allegations of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct.
- 1.2 The person making the complaint will be referred to as “the complainant” and the person against whom the complaint is made will be referred to as the “Subject Member”.
- 1.3 No member or officer will participate in any stage of the Arrangements (other than as a witness) if he or she has, or may have, any personal conflict of interest in the matter.
- 1.4 For reference a flowchart of the process is set out at the end of this document.
- 1.5 There are no powers in legislation and therefore under this complaints process for the suspension or dismissal of an elected councillor. In the event of a councillor being found in breach of the Code of Conduct only the sanctions as set out in Paragraph 13 below apply.

2. Making a complaint

- 2.1 A complainant must be made in writing on the Council’s standard form (available on the Council’s website) either by post or e-mail to; For the attention of The Monitoring Officer, HR & Legal, D Floor, Tower Block, Town Hall, Blackburn BB1 7DY. email: MonitoringOfficer@blackburn.gov.uk
- 2.2 The complainant must provide their name and a contact address or an email address, so that the Council can acknowledge receipt of the complaint, request any further information and keep the complainant informed of its progress. If the complainant would like to keep their name and address confidential, they must indicate this in writing, in which case the Council we will not disclose the complainant’s name and address to the Subject Member until their request for confidentiality has been considered by the Monitoring Officer Section 5 (Confidentiality) below.
The Council will not investigate anonymous complaints, unless there is a clear public interest in doing so.
- 2.3 Formal standards complaints about the conduct of a parish councillor towards a clerk should be made by the chair or by the parish council as a whole, rather than the clerk in all but exceptional circumstances.

- 2.4 The Monitoring Officer will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days of receiving it, and will keep the complainant informed of the progress of your complaint. At the same time the Monitoring Officer will write to the Subject Member (and in the case of a complaint about a Town/Parish Councillor to the Clerk of the Town/Parish Council also) with details of the allegations (subject to any representations from the complainant on confidentiality, which are accepted as valid by the Monitoring Officer under Section 5 (Confidentiality) below).
- 2.5 The Subject Member may, within five working days of receipt, make written representations to the Monitoring Officer which must be taken into account when deciding how the complaint should be dealt with. Representations received after this time may be taken into account, at the discretion of the Monitoring Officer, but will in any event not be considered after the Monitoring Officer has issued the initial assessment of the complaint.

3. Initial Assessment of Complaint

- 3.1 The Monitoring Officer will review the complaint and, following consultation with the Independent Person take a decision (initial assessment) as to whether it merits investigation, or another course of action. This decision will normally be taken within 20 working days of receipt of a complaint.

The complaint will be rejected if;

- The complaint is not against one or more named Members or co-opted Members of the Council or a Town/Parish Council within its district;
 - The Subject Member was not in office at the time of the alleged conduct and a Code of Conduct was in force at the time.
 - The complaint, if proven, would not be a breach of the Code of Conduct under which the Subject Member was operating at the time of the alleged misconduct.
 - The complaint is anonymous (unless the Monitoring Officer determines that it is the public interest to consider it)
- 3.2 If the complaint has not been rejected on the grounds in 3.1 the Monitoring Officer will then go on to apply the following criteria in deciding whether a complaint should be considered;
- Whether a substantially similar allegation has previously been made by the complainant to Standards for England, or the Standards Committee, or the complaint has been the subject of an investigation by another regulatory authority;
 - Whether the complaint is about something that happened so long ago that those involved are unlikely to remember it clearly enough to provide credible evidence, or where the lapse of time means there would be little benefit or point in taking action now;
 - ~~Whether the allegation discloses a potential breach of the Code of Conduct, but the complaint is not serious enough to merit any action and~~

- ~~i. The resources needed to investigate and determine the complaint are wholly disproportionate to the allegations and~~
 - ~~ii. Whether in all the circumstances there is no overriding public benefit in carrying out an investigation.~~
- Whether the complaint appears to be malicious, vexatious, **trivial**, politically motivated or tit for tat;
 - Whether the complaint suggests that there is a wider problem throughout the Authority;
 - Whether (after the Monitoring Officer making preliminary enquiries) it is apparent that the Subject Member is relatively inexperienced as a Member or has admitted making an error and the matter would not warrant a more serious sanction;
 - Whether training or conciliation would be the appropriate response.
 - **Whether the allegation discloses a potential breach of the Code of Conduct, but the complaint is not serious enough to merit any action**

And taking all or any of the above into account:

- i. The resources needed to investigate and determine the complaint are wholly disproportionate to the allegations and**
- ii. Whether in all the circumstances there is no overriding public benefit in carrying out an investigation.**

In appropriate cases, the Monitoring Officer may seek to resolve the complaint informally, without the need for an investigation.

Such informal resolution may involve the Subject Member accepting that his/her conduct was unacceptable and offering an apology, or taking other steps. Where the Subject Member or the Authority (in appropriate cases) makes a reasonable offer of local resolution, but it is rejected by the complainant, the Monitoring Officer will take account of this in deciding whether the complaint merits formal investigation.

The Monitoring Officer will consult with the Independent Person and then give his decision on how the complaint will be dealt with. The Monitoring Officer may in exceptional circumstances refer the question of how to proceed to a Sub-Committee of the Standards Committee.

4. Additional Information

- 4.1 The Monitoring Officer may require additional information before coming to a decision and may request information from the Subject Member.

- 4.2 Where the complaint relates to a Town/Parish Councillor, the Monitoring Officer may also inform the Clerk of the Town/Parish Council of the complaint and seek the views of the Clerk of the Town/Parish Council before deciding whether the complaint merits formal investigation or other action.
- 4.3 If the complaint identifies criminal conduct or breach of other regulations by any person, the Monitoring Officer is authorised to report this to the Police or other prosecuting or regulatory authority, in addition to any action taken pursuant to the Code.
- 4.4 In circumstances of alleged criminal conduct as set out in paragraph 4.2 above the timescales relating to the handling of the complaint throughout this procedure will be amended to facilitate the investigation by the Police or other prosecuting regulatory authority.

5. Confidentiality

- 5.1 If a complainant has asked for their identity to be withheld, this request will be considered by the Monitoring Officer at the initial assessment stage.
- 5.2 As a matter of fairness and natural justice the Subject Member should usually be told who has complained about them and receive details of the complaint. However, in exceptional circumstances, the Monitoring Officer may withhold the complainant's identity if on request from the complainant, or otherwise, they are satisfied that the complainant has reasonable grounds for believing that they or any witness relevant to the complaint may be at risk of physical harm, or his or her employment may be jeopardised if their identity is disclosed, or where there are medical risks (supported by medical evidence) associated with the complainant's identity being disclosed.
- 5.3 If the Monitoring Officer decides to refuse a request by a complainant for confidentiality, they will offer the complainant the option to withdraw the complaint, rather than proceed with his or her identity being disclosed. The Monitoring Officer will balance whether the public interest in taking action on a complaint will outweigh the complainant's wish to have his or her identity withheld from the Subject Member.

6. Investigation

- 6.1 The Monitoring Officer will appoint an investigating officer where a complaint merits formal investigation. **Considering potential conflicts of interest** the Investigating Officer may be a Council officer, an officer from another council, or an external investigator.
- 6.2 The Investigating Officer will follow guidance issued by the Monitoring Officer on the investigation of complaints. The guidance will follow the principles of proportionality and the cost effective use of Council resources and shall be interpreted in line with these principles.
- 6.3 The Investigating Officer will ensure that the Subject Member receives a copy of the complaint – subject to the Monitoring Officer decision on confidentiality. **The subject member is required to comply with any formal standards investigation, failure to do so would be considered a breach of the Code of Conduct in itself.**
- 6.4 At the end of their investigation, the Investigating Officer will produce a draft report and will send copies of that draft report to the complainant and to the Subject Member, for comments.

The Investigating Officer will take such comments into account before issuing their final report to the Monitoring Officer.

- 6.5 Although it is not possible to be prescriptive of the length of investigation, however normally it would be expected that any investigation once commenced would not normally exceed 20 working days. In any event both the Complainant and the Subject Member will be advised of the timescale and updated should this require amendment.

7. Investigating Officer finding of no failure to comply with the Code of Conduct

- 7.1 Where the Investigating Officer's report does not find that the Subject Member has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct, the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person, will review the Investigating Officer's report and if satisfied, will confirm the finding of no failure to comply with the Code of Conduct.
- 7.2 The Monitoring Officer will write to the complainant and the subject Member (and to the Clerk of the Town/Parish Council, where the complaint relates to a Town/Parish Councillor), with a copy of the decision and the Investigating Officer's report within 10 working days of receipt of the completed report.
- 7.3 If the Monitoring Officer is not satisfied that the investigation has been conducted thoroughly, the Investigating Officer may be asked to reconsider the report and the conclusions.

8 Investigating Officer finding of sufficient evidence of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct.

Where the Investigating Officer's report does find that the Subject Member has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct, the Monitoring Officer will review the Investigating Officer's report and will then either send the matter for a hearing before the Hearings Panel normally within 20 working days of receiving the report or resolve the matter under section 9 below without the need for a hearing.

9. Resolution

If the Monitoring Officer considers that the matter can reasonably be resolved without the need for a hearing, they will consult with the Independent Person and the complainant and seek to agree a fair resolution. Such resolution may include the Subject Member accepting that their conduct was unacceptable and offering an apology, and/or other remedial action. If the Subject Member accepts the suggested resolution, the Monitoring Officer will report the outcome to the Standards Committee and the Clerk to the Town/Parish Council (if appropriate) for information, but will take no further action. If the complainant or the Subject Member refuses the resolution in principle or to engage with the agreed outcome, the Monitoring Officer will refer the matter normally within 20 working days for a hearing without further reference to the complainant or the Subject Member.

10. Hearing

Where, in the opinion of the Monitoring Officer, a resolution without a hearing is not appropriate or the complainant and/or Subject Member refuses to co-operate, then the Monitoring Officer will report the Investigating Officer's findings to the Hearings Panel which will conduct a

hearing before deciding whether the Subject Member has failed to comply with a Code of Conduct and, if so, what action (if any) to take in respect of the Member.

The Standards Committee will agree and adopt a procedure for local hearings.

11. Constitution of the Hearings Panel

The Hearings Panel is a sub-committee of the Council's Standards Committee. The Council have decided that it will comprise of at least one of the independent members co-opted to the Standards Committee and three members of the Council drawn from at least two different political parties. Where the complaint is about a Town or a Parish Council Member, the Hearings Panel will include at least one of the Town/Parish Council Members co-opted to the Standards Committee.

The Independent Person is invited to attend all meetings of the Hearings Panel and their views must be sought and taken into consideration before the Hearings Panel takes any decision on whether the Subject Member's conduct constitutes a failure to comply with the code of conduct and as to any action to be taken following a finding of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct.

12. The Independent Person

The Independent Person must be a person who has applied for the post following advertisements of a vacancy for the post, and approved by a positive vote from a majority of all the Members of the Council at a meeting of the full Council.

A person is not eligible for appointment if they:

- are, or have been within the past five years a Member, co-opted Member or officer of the Council;
- are, or have been within the past five years a Member, co-opted Member or officer of a Town or Parish Council within the Borough; or
- are a relative or close friend of a person within bullet points 1 or 2 above.

For this purpose, "relative" means that:

- Spouse or civil partner;
- Living with the other person as husband and wife or as if they were civil partners;
- Grandparents of the other person;
- A lineal descendant of a grandparent of the other person;
- A parent, sibling or child of the person within the above bullet points;
- A spouse or civil partner of a person within the above bullet points; or
- Living with a person within the above bullet points or as husband and wife or as if they were civil partners.

13. Action

Where a Hearings Panel find that a Subject Member has failed to comply with the code of conduct, the Council has delegated to the Hearings Panel such of its powers to take action in respect of Subject Members as may be necessary to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. Accordingly, the Hearings Panel may –

- Publish its findings in respect of the Subject Member's conduct;
- Report its finding to Council (or to the Town/Parish Council) for information;
- Recommend to Council that the Subject Member be censured;
- Recommend to the Subject Member's group leader (or in the case of ungrouped members recommend to Council) that he/she be removed from any or all committees or sub committees of the Council;
- Recommend to the Leader of the Council that the Subject Member be removed from the Executive, or removed from their portfolio responsibilities;
- Instruct the Monitoring Officer to (or recommend that the Town/Parish Council) arrange training for the Subject Member;
- Recommend to Council (or recommend to the Town/Parish Council) that the Subject Member be removed from all outside bodies, appointments to which they have been appointed or nominated by the Council (or by the Town/Parish Council);
- Withdraw (or recommend to the Town/Parish Council that it withdraws) facilities provided to the Subject Member by the Council such as a computer, website and/or e-mail and internet access; or
- Placing such restrictions on Subject Member's access to staff which may be reasonable in the circumstances and in accordance with the Member/Officer Protocol provided that such restrictions do not impede the Subject Member from carrying out their duties as a Councillor

14 Decision Notice

Where a decision on an allegation of misconduct is made following a formal investigation, a decision notice will be published as soon as possible on the council's website, including a brief statement of facts, the provisions of the code engaged by the allegations, the view of the Independent Person, the reasoning of the decision-maker, and any sanction applied.

15 Withdrawal of a Complaint

In the event that a complainant withdraws a complaint at any time prior to a decision having been made by a Hearings Panel, the Monitoring Officer may, following consultation with the Independent Person, decide that no further steps be taken in respect of that complaint but shall, in taking such a decision take into account any issues which may arise under Paragraph 3.1(c) of the Code of Conduct.

16 Revision of these Arrangements

The Council may by resolution or delegation to the Monitoring Officer agree to amend these arrangements and has delegated to the Chair of the Hearings Panel the right to depart from these arrangements where they consider that it is expedient to do so in order to secure the effective treatment and fair consideration of any matters.

17. Appeals

Subject to judicial review or a decision of a Local Government Ombudsman, there is no right of appeal against the decision of a Monitoring Officer or of the Hearings Panel.

Report to the Council Forum, 25th March 2021

Progress of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees

The three Overview and Scrutiny Committees met in March to continue work on their scrutiny of the Council's response to the COVID 19 pandemic.

People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee met on 8th March and looked at the key issues of the distribution of the vaccine, how the borough was meeting the challenges of the pandemic and the review of safeguarding of children. The Committee also received an update from the Youth Forum on their work especially on young people and mental health.

Vaccinations and work of the Public Health Department.

The Committee received an update from Jane Scattergood, Covid-19 Vaccination Director on the progress of the vaccination in the borough and the uptake by cohort. The Committee looked at the locations of the vaccination centres and the community based venues being used. The Committee received information on the targeting of the vaccine by occupation and a timetable for the completion of the JCVI 1-9 cohorts by both first and second doses. The local ambition exceeded the national targets for all areas. The Committee also received information on the steps being taken to overcome issues of resistance in communities and the way that reassurances were being given to achieve the maximum take up of the vaccine. This was being achieved through simple key messages including:-

- Information on the safety of the vaccine and the vaccine approval process that has been used
- That getting vaccinated means protecting yourself, family and friends.
- That the vaccine can't give you the infection and will reduce your chance of becoming seriously ill.
- The vaccine will protect you so you can protect others.

The Committee welcomed the progress on the distribution of the vaccine and the steps being taken to maximise the take up and work to breakdown resistance.

The Committee were updated on the work that was ongoing to keep the community as safe as possible and the steps being taken to try and achieve the maximum levels of vaccines available that would match the infection rates in the borough and the region. Members expressed concern about the disproportionate impact on different groups in the various communities and, whilst 'health' was the highest priority there would inevitably be socio economic inequality in the Borough and throughout the North West.

The Committee supported the work of the Chief Executive, Directors of Public Health and others in making representations to seek to achieve this.

Review of Safeguarding

The Committee were informed of the key areas of the review of safeguarding and how the review was being conducted. Mr Steve Ashley, who was leading the review and how this was to be conducted. The Committee were informed that the review had children at the heart and

would seek to ensure that the voice of young people were heard. The Youth Forum Members would be involved in the review and the outcome reported back to the Committee.

Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee met on 15th March and looked at two key areas of the Council's service that had been affected by the pandemic.

Cemeteries and Burials.

The Committee looked at the way that the service had addressed the challenges that had been caused by the pandemic and in particular how the service had to prepare sufficient graves in preparation for increased burial numbers, by pre-digging graves and keeping on top of these, to accommodate potential rises in death rates across the borough. The service had to work within Government legislation that saw restrictions on access to cemeteries and crematoriums with areas being closed, such as the crematoria for all but cremation services, plus cemeteries initially also, aside from services. Signage and communications had to be provided. The Government legislation periodically changed during the pandemic and cemetery access was eventually provided for those wishing to pay their respect to loved ones, but crematoriums remain closed to all but cremation services. Further Government restrictions on numbers attending both burials and cremations had changed periodically over the last 12 months, with the current restrictions allowing 22 mourners in the crematorium and 30 mourners at burials, to enable social distancing to be maintained. Face coverings are also mandatory for those who do not have any underlying conditions in the crematorium, with the Council providing them free to those who do not bring them.

The Committee were updated on how the service had sought to keep staff safe and on the introduction of webcasting of cremation services early April 2020. This had been positively welcomed. This has also been supplemented by additional music and video memorials being made available for cremation services. This had necessitated the relaxation of restrictions on filming in cemeteries to enable burial services to be provided by family members as webcasting of burials was not possible due to the lack of Wi-Fi availability at gravesides.

Occasional breaches of numbers attending funerals had occurred, with these incidents reported directly to the Police, who were responsible for enforcing the legislation relating to gatherings. Where these incidents occur, the Council also writes to the funeral organisers, including funeral directors, requiring them to ensure the applicable number attending is maintained. Lighting had been provided for burials during the darker evenings in winter, to ensure numbers being buried each day are maximised. A temporary toilet facility has been hired, with regular cleaning taking place during the pandemic, given that during high numbers of funerals, there is limited access to toilet facilities.

The Committee looked at the current capacity of the boroughs cemeteries and work that was ongoing to identify suitable areas for development. The Committee will revisit this area in the near future when suitable sites were proposed. The Committee thanked the director for the presentation and asked that these thanks be forwarded to all members of staff who had worked so hard on the front line of service provision during the pandemic and continue to do so.

The Economic Recovery of the Borough.

The Committee looked at the work undertaken in the Borough to seek to minimise the negative effects of the pandemic on the economy and businesses. The Executive Member outlined the

successes that had been made in the economic development of the Borough prior to the pandemic including 5,000 new jobs created and 1,300 new homes delivered in the last 3-years with a strong enterprise culture, diverse economic base, cash-rich business community, growing international trade links & large health economy all being supported.

He outlined progress that had continued despite the pandemic including key developments progressing at Milking Lane, Wainwright Way, Carl Fogarty Way, with increasing enquiries for new business space. New housing developments were progressing at Griffin, Alaska St, Baileys Field, Fishmoor Drive, Holden Fold. The Mall / Markets re-opened with fewer occupiers. Footfall was rising (but 50% below pre-COVID levels) with major retailers withdrawing from all high streets.

There had been no major redundancies but severe difficulties elsewhere including Rolls-Royce at Barnoldswick & Safran in Burnley. At the peak of the pandemic 20,000 residents had been furloughed through COVID and 5,000 were still off work. Latest figures were expected to show a rise and delayed unemployment when national support ended was likely. The Portfolio would continue working with HIVE, BID, Chamber, Growth Lancashire to track business needs – Q&A sessions, surveys, surgeries, etc.

The Committee were informed that £55M in mandatory grant support had been provided to over 3,500 businesses, with £4M in discretionary grant support to 600 business. COVID business support grants on-going, though limited support for self-employed. Financial support was being provided for market traders in Blackburn and Darwen Market traders and to hospitality and retail sector to adapt to COVID restrictions. Support was also being given to major employers for smart testing of their workforces

The Committee were updated on the work on Reimagining Lancashire – An Economic Recovery Framework with LCC, Blackpool and LEP which had been submitted the Government and led to a “Lancashire” Ministerial Taskforce to review recovery/long-term plans. The Growth Programme for 2020/21 had been agreed by Executive Board and was on track and progress on initiatives including the Darwen Town Investment Plan and Blackburn Growth Axis was ongoing to maximise the potential of the Boroughs economy.

The Committee welcomed the work that was being undertaken to protect the Boroughs economy and the potential developments outlined in the growth strategy.

Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 22nd March and looked at a number of issues including the Councils Digital Strategy, a review of the Call-in Process and sickness and absence.

Health and Wellbeing and Sickness Absence.

The Committee had looked at the issue of wellbeing, sickness and absence at previous meetings and as agreed looked at comparisons with other authorities and also what was being done to promote wellbeing within the authority. The Committee also looked at the way that the service had dealt with the challenges that had arisen from the covid19 pandemic together with the work done by health and safety to maintain safe working environments, especially in schools.

The Committee noted that up to now been no cross infections within the Council employees which meant that the work practices identified by Health and Safety were being followed and

were working. The Committee noted the exceptional levels of work that had gone into making schools and work places safe and the work to ensure that the wellbeing of staff was paramount was applauded.

Digital Strategy.

The Committee looked at the vision for the Council's digital strategy. The strategy set out a vision for three areas, the Borough, the Customer Experience and the needs of a high performing Organisation. It had been intended to launch the strategy last summer however given the pandemic had meant that different ways of working and a number of strands of the vision had been delivered early to support the needs of the organisation. The strategy sought to deliver better digital access, a better connected place and digital skills.

Members of the Committee drew attention to the need to include all citizens in the delivery of the vision as there were still considerable numbers of residents who were either not confident in the use of digital technology or were not able to engage digitally. The Committee were informed that the vision aimed to ensure that no one was left behind and that ability to engage digitally would not deny access to services. The Committee would continue to look at the roll out of the digital strategy and how this enhanced the services delivered by the Council.

Call-in Procedure.

The Committee looked at the procedure followed during a call-in and the procedure outlined in the constitution. The Committee recalled that the Standards Committee had agreed that a review be carried out to ensure that the best practice was being followed. Members agreed that a Task Group be established to look at the issue and examples of best practice from other authorities. The Committee will consist of a politically balanced group of members including representation from the Standards Committee, People and Place Committees and the Chair of the Call-in Committee together with representation from this Committee. The Task Group would meet in the new municipal year and report back in the autumn.

Councillor Sylvia Liddle Chair of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Suleman Khonat, Chair of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Dave Harling, Chair of the Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR MOHAMMED KHAN

Date: 25th March 2021

People: A good quality of life for all of our residents

Health and Wellbeing

On 10th March, the Health and Wellbeing Board held its fourth meeting since the introduction of restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The agenda included a range of non COVID-19 specific items including, Better Care Fund, Disabled Facilities Grant, Lancashire Child Death Overview Panel Annual Report and a comprehensive update from Healthwatch BwD.

On 11th March, exactly one year on from the World Health Organisation declaring COVID-19 a global pandemic, a joint meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board, Health Protection Board and Local Outbreak Engagement Board was convened to reflect on the last year and discuss the action needed to improve the health of our populations over the coming year. A summary of the health, social, economic and other impacts of COVID-19 was considered, including key recommendations for consideration by all partners.

Both meetings were conducted remotely using Microsoft Teams and enabled supportive and constructive dialogue with all partners.

Health and Care Integration

The integrated health, care and community workforce continues to work hard to ensure residents are supported as best as possible during these challenging times. The weekly integrated neighbourhood teams, which include representation from District Nursing, Adult Social Care and Voluntary, Community, Faith Sector organisations, have developed highly effective ways of working online to jointly plan and co-ordinate much needed support and services for vulnerable residents.

The Social Prescribing Alliance which meets on a monthly basis has a steady growing membership. Over 14 community based organisations join forces on a regular basis to improve the physical and mental well-being of local people by offering a range of non-medical interventions. The frontline workforce are greatly benefitting from the opportunity to develop awareness of local provision, share good practice with each other and access high quality training opportunities. Recently, recruitment of five additional Social Prescribing Link Workers has taken place. They look forward to joining the Alliance and developing key relationships with Primary Care colleagues.

Over the next few weeks Social Prescribing Link Workers along with staff from Lancashire & South Cumbria Foundation Trust and Age UK BwD, are making welfare calls to local people who have been discharged from hospital following a covid-19 positive diagnosis. Due to the excellent partnerships that exist in BwD it is envisaged that the calls will help identify any unmet social, health and wellbeing needs and ensure local people are supported to navigate the services available to support greater health and wellbeing.

Since the last report, an innovative project has commenced within a small number of Care Homes to help local elderly residents access and participate in a range of new, highly engaging wellbeing activities using virtual reality and live distance learning. Through a partnership consisting of Primary Care, Care Network and the Council's Adult Learning Team a small grant from the Active Lancashire Tackling Inequalities Fund has been secured. The funding has been used to purchase virtual reality kits and IT equipment with a view to reduce loneliness and social isolation in Care Homes during the pandemic. It is hoped that further funding can be secured to expand the project in other Care Homes across BwD and Pennine Lancashire.

Place: Community pride in a vibrant place to live and visit

Our Community, Our Future social integration programme

Recommissioning work has begun for three successful Our Community, Our Future projects: Youth Ambassadors, Community Ambassadors and Workforce Integration Ambassadors. Plans are in place for these three important projects to start from April, in line with the government's road map. Commissioned partners – the Strategic Youth

Alliance, Spring North and Blackburn College – are building contingency into their plans to allow sessions to go ahead online if small face-to-face groups cannot meet.

The social integration team will launch another wave of Our Community, Our Future grants in mid-April. Grants of between £2,000 and £5,000 will be available to local groups and organisations who have ideas for projects that have integration at their heart and collaborative bids from two or more groups are encouraged. The Learning English Together programme of ESOL classes and social mixing activities will end on 31 March. Partners have adapted well to delivering sessions online. Particular successes include Arts2Heal's sessions delivered over Zoom bringing together women who would not normally mix, and song, craft and storytelling sessions run by Home Start Blackburn & Darwen for parents with pre-school children. Learners are growing in confidence as they practise their English in these sessions. Over the next six months, the Learning English Together website will be developed to introduce a learner resources section and add more content.

The team is also exploring an ESOL Buddy scheme of conversation classes, and a higher level learning programme for learners who had professional roles in their home countries, to help them get jobs that use their skills.

Community Volunteer Awards 2021

I am very pleased to let you know that the Community Volunteer Awards is returning this year after an enforced pause due to the pandemic. It will make its return on Wednesday, November 3rd at King George's Hall.

This is a really important event that celebrates and highlights our dedicated and selfless volunteers. There are so many people in this borough who go above and beyond and this last year has shown us that community and helping each other is more important than ever.

I fully expect to see countless examples of volunteering and helping out from so many of the residents of Blackburn with Darwen. I hope everyone will help to nominate the people who have made a real difference this year, whether it is through helping their neighbours in so many ways, cleaning up their community, or just reaching out to be a friendly ear to someone in need.

Council: Delivered by a strong and resilient Council

Census 2021

With Census day on 21st March 2021, the Office of National Statistics (ONS) have been sending out invites for residents to take part and from the 22nd March ONS fieldwork staff will be out and about in the borough helping residents with enquiries and following up no response.

Whilst there is a requirement for us all to complete the census by law, our borough had a good response to the last census in 2011. The information available from the Census continues to be a hugely important to us it remains the only place we can get range of ward and borough level statistics, and is more important than ever as we develop our services and our recovery from covid-19.

Budget 2021

The Chancellor announced the Budget 2021 on 3rd March 2021 and I was disappointed and underwhelmed to hear no reference to adult social care, public health or local government. We have proven in the past 12 months that we can deliver services quickly, efficiently and in response to local needs. For the Chancellor to not recognise this was disheartening. Council budgets continue to be impacted and as a borough we have been delivering services in a period of austerity for a decade now. I believe it is unfair to force councils to raise council tax to pay for social care when it is well known and well documented with research that a long-term sustainable solution is desperately needed.

Following the Budget 2021, the National Audit Office has published a worrying report about the state of finances in local government. 25 councils are on the brink of financial ruin and many have already asked the government for support. We are not one of them as we have been managing our budget well for the past ten years despite austerity measures - indeed we set a balanced budget for 2021/22 at our Finance Council meeting at the beginning of this

month. But the government needs to recognise that this cannot be a permanent state of affairs. They need to recognise the value of local government and invest accordingly in the sector.

Elections 2021

The local elections which were postponed in 2020 due to the pandemic will be going ahead in May this year. The elections this year are for Blackburn with Darwen Council, Darwen Town Council, Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire and Parish Council elections. Whilst many people will have been vaccinated by this date and we will have extra safety measures in place, many people may still want to vote by post. As this is proving popular, please do not delay in registering at <https://www.blackburn.gov.uk/elections-and-voting> if you wish to use this option. Otherwise you can vote in person on the day or ask someone you trust, to vote on your behalf with a proxy vote.

The elections will be an opportunity to send a message to government about significant failures around spending and transparency that have occurred during the past 12 months. The failure of the national Test and Trace system despite a budget of £37billion over two years is a reflection of how budgets are not being managed properly at a national level. Despite our own local budget struggles we have managed to deliver a successful local Test and Trace system along with many other local councils. At a time when the public sector and VCFS is in dire need of funding, we have proved time and time again how we can deliver successful local programmes based on local need. Alongside this, the lack of transparency around COVID-19 contracts including those awarded for PPE, has been ruled as unlawful by the High Court because they were not published within the 30 day deadline. Public trust in institutions is of immense importance during these difficult times and unlawful activity of this kind risks undermining the good work we are doing locally.

COVID-19

It has been over 12 months now since a global pandemic was declared by the World Health Organisation and in that time we have seen our lives change dramatically. But now with a vaccination programme in place we can start to look forward to doing the things we love again. A report on how we have responded to the pandemic is elsewhere on this agenda, but I want to use this opportunity to say a huge, heartfelt thank you to every volunteer, resident, business and staff member from across the public, private and VCFS sector who helped make our response possible. From the first stages of the BwD Help Hub scheme to volunteers at the county's first large scale vaccination centre at the Cathedral, they have shown immense care and courage in making sure that BwD responds to the pandemic to its full potential. I am proud to be Leader of a borough whose response has been so well supported.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR DIGITAL AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

COUNCILLOR QUESIR MAHMOOD

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICER: PAUL FLEMING
25 March 2021

People: A good quality of life for all our residents

Customer services

The reopening of our receptions, including Town Halls, will coincide with the lifting of national restrictions on non-essential retail. This is currently planned for the 12th April 2021 and is dependent on the progress against the government's roadmap out of lockdown. During lock down restrictions, our Customer Services team have continued to predominantly work remotely to maintain our service and support to residents.

Over the past 12 months, the number of customer requests received through online chat has more than doubled to over 14,000. The number of emails and telephone calls to Customer Services have both decreased compared to the 12 months prior to COVID-19. We will undertake analysis after year-end (April), to further understand this shift to digital channels.

The team will soon expand online chat to provide an automated 24/7 service. This will offer customers an easy, online option for straightforward questions as well as sign posting to web pages and forms.

Registrars

The reduced infections of COVID and the improving picture in the borough has had a direct impact on the numbers of death registration required by the team. The reduction to more manageable numbers has allowed the team to look at planning for the relaxation of restrictions and the expected significant increase in rescheduled and new wedding requests.

Registrars have continued to provide essential services throughout the pandemic.

Resilience & Emergency Planning Service

The Resilience & Emergency Planning Manager has been supporting the response to Covid19 since March 2020, and is part of the team progressing with recovery planning and moving to new business as normal, taking into account the Lancashire Resilience (LRF) revised ways of working and the Governments new "roadmap".

The Emergency Planning training that the Service is delivering to all Community schools is now being rolled out to all Independent, Free and Academy schools too. This will ensure awareness and consistency across the borough in delivery and support. The exercise element of the support is currently being worked up to deliver across three sessions, to be delivered to schools between June and July 2021.

The service is now working on translating the National Risk Register and National Security Risk Assessment risks and consequences into a local set of community risk assessments. This is alongside the support to the LRF in assessing county wide risks, and then progressing subsequent local mitigations e.g. revised plan, revised processes and training.

Quarter 3 Sept to Dec 2020

Information & Enquiries received = 208

Warnings received = 96

Total = 304

Duty Officer Activations = 23 & Strategic Officer Activations = 1 (Gas Cloud incident)

Digital Strategy

Over the last few months the team have been working with colleagues across the Council to update our Digital Strategy. This will outline our approach to transforming services and our technology infrastructure during the next four years. The strategy articulates a vision for the borough which includes;

- A future-proofed, high speed, connected borough
- Improved access to digital services and opportunities
- Co-ordinated skills offering to help residents utilise new technology and compete for jobs

This will be supported by a number of workstreams which includes;

- A digital-first approach, making our services easier to access and available online 24/7
- Increasing digital and transformative skills for staff
- Improved insights from data, to better understand resident's needs and inform decision making
- A future proofed technology infrastructure which is cost effective, secure and resilient

Digital Customer Experience

Usage of our Digital Customer Portal continues to grow, providing residents with more opportunities to utilise and interact with services online. Latest additions include Active Travel consultation, allowing residents to provide ideas, comments and concerns on the use of the existing transport network and to propose new schemes / improvements; this takes our total number of online services to 50.

The DCP continues to support the COVID effort and in light of recent government announcements the team have produced a number of new online forms and advice to assist with isolation support and grants to businesses affected by the pandemic. The team have also developed new forms for businesses to use, to order lateral flow testing kits.

Work on waste services is progressing and the Digital team are working with the DCP software supplier to co-design a user-friendly online experience. This will allow customers to report issues as well as book a wide range of council waste services.

Since its launch in Spring 2020, the customer portal has received over 100,000 service requests and now has over 34,000 registered users. In February 2021 over 10,000 online appointments and permits were booked by residents for Household Waste and Recycling Centres alone.

Other key successes during the pandemic have included using the Digital Customer Portal to receive and workflow Help Hub requests and provide access to online forms for financial support for both individuals and businesses. By using the Digital Customer Portal for all of these interactions has meant that individuals and businesses can self-serve and request support 24/7.

Council: Delivered by a strong and resilient council

Supporting remote working

The digital team continue to provide remote systems and support to the large number of staff working from home during the pandemic as well as enabling remote council meetings for Members.

The introduction of Microsoft Teams at the start of the pandemic has enabled the council to continue to operate effectively, remotely, keeping staff, members and residents safe. The amount of work-based travel costs in the council is forecast to have halved, enabled by new ways of meeting and communicating. In addition, commuting to and from work has been minimised, contributing further to the challenge of improving air quality in the borough.

The council currently has over 1800 active users of Microsoft Teams with over 9000 attendances at remote meetings per month. There are over 80,000 chat interactions over Teams each month throughout the council.

Business Intelligence

The team have continued to develop data dashboards to inform senior officers and Members around the COVID-19 impact and response. Recently we have delivered a 'Secondary Impact' dashboard, informing relevant leads around Help Hub demand and the economic impacts of COVID-19 on our resident population.

We have expanded the data available through our primary COVID-19 dashboard to include numbers of patients discharged from hospitals into the community 'Virtual COVID Ward'. This data is now presented alongside COVID cases, testing, deaths, hospital admissions and our local contact tracing partnership performance. Presenting the data through visual dashboards has informed decision making throughout the challenges of the pandemic.

Services across the organisation have been given access to the new Business Intelligence platform throughout the past 12 months, including Highways, HR and Adults Services. Multiple dashboards have been developed and leads have recently formed a Business Intelligence Centre of Excellence across the council.

Business Operations

The team have worked closely with all departments to drive forward digital transformation, supporting a wide range of services to transition to smarter ways of working, and make effective use of communication technology such as Microsoft Teams. A major success has been the enabling of all statutory meetings across Childrens and Adult Services to be undertaken, virtually; ensuring vital services can continue to operate to support families.

IT Support & DevOps

Our IT support teams have continually supported officers and Members. Over the past 12 months we have rolled out additional IT equipment including mobile devices and headsets to enable increased remote working. We have maintained a reduced face to face appointment service in a COVID safe environment for those that need it as well as facilitating delivery of equipment where relevant.

The DevOps team have implemented improved IT infrastructure to meet the demands of remote working, increasing security and network capacity. We have increased our capacity around Cyber Security, re-designating an existing role to specialise in this increasing critical area. The council's

critical IT systems have remained stable and reliable throughout the past year and our infrastructure has enabled a work from home policy across large parts of the workforce.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE 25th March 2021

COUNCILLOR VICKY McGURK

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICERS: LOUISE MATTINSON
DAVID FAIRCLOUGH**

People: A good quality of life for all our residents

Revenues and Benefits

Business Rates

The Business Rates team continues to administer the Local Restriction Support Grant scheme on behalf of the government and has now paid all eligible businesses until the 31st March 2021. Since the start of COVID, the team has distributed approximately 12,000 grants, totalling over £59m to the business community of the borough.

Further grants have been announced in the budget which are intended to 'restart' businesses as the restriction measures are lifted. As these will relate to businesses who have already received grants, the council will contact them directly, as such, there is no need for members to promote the new grants or ask individuals to make applications.

The budget also announced the extension of the business rate exemption for the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors. This extension will be for April to June, after which businesses will receive 66% relief until the end of the financial year. Due to the lateness of this announcement, the council has not been able to issue bills reflecting the change and will therefore be required to rebill all those businesses affected by the exemption extension as soon as possible. A letter will be included in the annual bills explaining the situation to businesses.

Once the initial 3 months exemption of 100% has expired, all eligible businesses will be issued with a further bill outlining the applicable 66% discount for the period 1st July 2021 to 31st March 2022, and the instalments that are required to be paid.

Council tax

The recovery process for Council Tax arrears has been severely impacted this financial year, with the first summonses for non-payment only issued in January 2021. Whilst this has provided a boost to collection, it is expected that the level of arrears will be higher at the 31st March 2021 compared to last year.

Benefits

After a period of significant increases in Council Tax Support applications, the caseload has stabilised over the last two months. Whilst the reduction is welcomed, it is expected that increases will recommence in summer as furlough and other support packages to businesses end.

The delivery of the Test and Trace self-isolation support payments has resulted in a huge strain on the resources in the benefits service. Approximately 3,900 applications have been received, with a further 1,500 emails to customers being answered (up to the end of February). The government has now extended the scheme until the 30th June and amended the criteria to include parents and guardians of children asked to stay at home following outbreaks at school.

Advice Services

In advance of the current contract ending in 2022, work has commenced to review the existing specification with a view to designing a modern service that delivers on key objectives of the council. This work will continue through the summer and involve all departments within the council.

Council: Delivered by a strong and resilient council

Financial Services

The team have completed the budget setting process for 2021/22 and are now preparing for year-end closure of the accounts for 2020/21. Finance Managers are working with Directors across each of the portfolios to determine the impact of COVID on the final outturn positions, and the overall position for the Council as a whole.

The final COVID expenditure and income loss return for 2020/21 financial year is being prepared, this will be reviewed and verified by Government against the authority's financial ledger.

Audit & Assurance

Progress in delivering the 2020/21 Annual Audit Plan will be reported to the March Audit & Governance Committee meeting. The report will summarise the internal audit outcomes achieved to the end of February. It will also include an update on the progress of work to follow up the data matches highlighted from the latest National Fraud Initiative exercise, led by the Cabinet Office. In addition, the draft 2021/22 annual internal audit plan will be presented for approval. The plan sets out the work that the Audit & Assurance Team will carry out during 2021/22 to support the Section 151 Officer's statutory obligations to maintain an adequate and effective internal audit of the Council's accounting records and systems of internal control, governance and risk management.

A report will also be presented for consideration setting out the results of the assessment of the effectiveness of the Committee against the CIPFA best practice guidance for Audit Committees.

Corporate Procurement and Contracts

The Contracts and Procurement team have continued managing the logistical and distribution arrangements for the Council's supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), ensuring Council services, care providers and local schools have the PPE that they need.

The team have also been progressing a number of other 'business as usual' procurements, including various contracts for a new HR and Payroll IT system, grass cutting, drainage works, highways materials, and renovation works on Darwen Tower.

HR Services Including Resilience & Emergency Planning

The Service is in the process of procuring a new HR & payroll system to replace the existing system which is end of contract.

The HR service continues to develop its services to schools and all schools have either renewed their existing SLAS or purchased additional services for 2021/22. The Service

is also continuing to improve relationships within the Education sector and is working closely with Education Department colleagues to support school improvement.

The HR and Resilience & Emergency planning teams continue to provide support to the response to COVID, working with key leads across the Council to ensure the response can focus on a transition into recovery. The team are providing increased support on health and safety advice, which is being provided internally, and externally. Appropriate advice and support to employees shielding and dealing with health and wellbeing issues as a result of COVID is also being given.

The HR team are supporting the core team in respect of COVID to ensure that an appropriate resource plan is in place for the next 12 months to enable the Council to transition into delivering key priorities whilst acknowledging the need to continue providing a response and recovery plan for COVID 19, which links to the government's latest road map.

The Service have also produced and published the Equality Watch Report.

Legal & Governance Services

The team continues to support the legal work associated with the pandemic whilst maintaining ongoing legal matters.

The Governance team is continuing to make detailed plans and arrangements for the delivery of the Blackburn with Darwen Council elections, town and Parish elections and the elections for the Police and Crime Commissioner. These elections are taking place whilst restrictions due to the pandemic will be in place and therefore there will be some significant changes to the operation of polling stations and the count in order to assure health and safety of all concerned, candidates, public and elections officers.

The Government's published roadmap out of lockdown means that Committee meetings will currently be unable to commence in person until at least 21st June 2021. The Local Government Association are currently pressing the Government to extend the provisions in the regulations for continuing to hold public meetings remotely after 6th May 2021. Members will be kept informed of developments on this issue.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

COUNCILLOR PHIL RILEY

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR: MARTIN KELLY
DATE: 25 MARCH 2021**

PLACE, PRIORITY 4: CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

South East Blackburn Growth Deal Major Transport Scheme

New Link Road. Works are progressing well with the contractor installing drainage along the new link road with construction of footways also underway. Works are also well on with the connection into Blackamoor Road and completion/opening is targeted for May 2021.

Haslingden Road – There is lots of activity on this section including surfacing, drainage works and the diverting of underground services. The contractor remains on programme with planned completion to be in Summer 2021. This is the final project to be completed from the Growth Deal 3 'Pennine Gateways' funding which also included the major infrastructure improvements at Carl Fogarty Way, Brownhill Roundabout, Pleckgate Road, Whalley Old Road and Four Lane Ends.

Local Transport Plan 4

We are currently developing the LTP4 with LCC and Blackpool Council. The timetable for delivery and identified objectives will be agreed with local partners shortly and will be presented to members in due course.

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs)

The Council are part of a steering group with Lancashire County Council (LCC), Hyndburn and Rossendale Councils to develop an East Lancashire LCWIP. These frameworks will be completed later this year to inform national funding bids in 2022.

LCWIPs are a new, strategic approach to identifying cycling and walking improvements required at the local level. They enable a long-term approach to developing local cycling and walking networks, ideally over a 10-year period, and form a vital part of the national strategy to increase the number of trips made on foot or by cycle. The Department for Transport (DfT) have indicated that authorities with LCWIPs will be eligible for future capital funding.

Winter Maintenance

We experienced a prolonged period of severe winter weather in January and February and had several weeks of continuous gritting to reduce the risk from snow and ice on our network. Throughout this period, grit bins were checked and refilled. We have also replenished stocks of salt for our winter grit squads.

This period also saw the completion of two new weather stations that have been constructed at Yew Tree Drive, Blackburn and Bull Hill, Darwen. The new stations are powered by both wind and solar and will provide a more accurate weather forecast resulting in more efficient decision making for our winter maintenance leads.

PLACE, PRIORITY 5: SAFE & CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

Road Safety

Highways continue to deploy the five mobile speed indication devices across the network to monitor vehicle movements and speeds on our roads. We do this at targeted locations and at locations where we have received complaints of speeding. They remain on site for 7-days and the data collected is stored in our asset management system and used to determine if intervention is required, for example traffic calming, enabling a programme of road safety schemes to be developed.

Working with ward Councillors the Highways team developed a road safety scheme for Pole Lane, Darwen, and the approved traffic calming measures will be installed in April. Resulting from a speed survey, which recorded speeds well in excess of the limit, the scheme will provide chicanes to slow down traffic down, enabling a safer environment for our residents.

PLACE PRIORITY 6: STRONG, GROWING ECONOMY TO ENABLE SOCIAL MOBILITY

Growth Programme

The Growth Programme for 2020/21, which was approved at Executive Board in September, is continuing to be implemented as per the updates below. The Growth Programme for 2021/22 will be presented to Executive Board in April for approval.

Housing Developments

Further to the Growth Programme, the following major housing projects involving Council land are progressing through the planning stages:

- McDermott Homes were selected to purchase the Council land at Ellison Fold Way in Darwen and take forward a detailed planning application for residential development, which was received in February and is now under assessment. The application includes the adjacent privately-owned land and will deliver a combined total of around 340 new family dwellings including 70 affordable houses.
- Bids have been received in response to the final stage of procurement for the Haslingden Road Key Worker Housing Site, which will provide around 300 new homes close to Royal Blackburn Hospital, including a proportion of homes for NHS key workers. A preferred bidder will be selected by the summer, and a planning application is expected later this year.

- Countryside Homes and Together Housing have now received planning permission to build around 390 new homes of mixed tenure around Fishmoor Drive and Roman Road. The application incorporates two sites on Fishmoor Drive and one on Roman Road, and infrastructure works on Fishmoor Drive. Construction will commence later this year.
- Outline planning permission has been granted for up to 165 new homes at Whalley Old Road, a partially Council-owned site. The Council are working with adjacent landowners with site investigations to commence early summer to investigate the ground conditions. The landowners will commence with marketing the site later in the year.
- The Council is expecting a planning application for 30 new family homes in the spring from McDermott Homes for the Lomond Gardens site in Feniscowles.
- Land offers have been received for the residential development parcels at Milking Lane, Lower Darwen, which the Council owns as part of the Barnfield Blackburn Ltd Joint Venture. The preferred bidder will be selected this month, and a detailed 'reserved matters' planning application is expected later this year.

Other developments of Council land, at a more advanced stage, include the Griffin Redevelopment site, where Seddon Homes are building 56 new homes for Great Places in the first phase of development. Three sites in Mill Hill are currently under construction by Great Places at Shorrock Lane (former Laneside Care Home), Bowen Street and New Wellington Street. Applethwaite Homes are progressing well with new family homes under construction at Tower Road, and Places for People are in the final stages of their development in Alaska Street, Infirmary Waterside, which is almost complete. This includes the first adaptive homes built in the borough.

Commercial Developments

Legals are progressing for the Council's purchase of the former Thwaites Brewery site, as part of a Joint Venture with Maple Grove. Further updates regarding site proposals will be reported as the project moves forward.

Good progress is continuing to be made at the Milking Lane development site, which the Council is bringing forward as part of the Joint Venture Company – Barnfield Blackburn Ltd. Construction of the new link road through the site with associated flood prevention infrastructure began last August, and is to be completed summer 2021.

Work to agree disposal of the remaining Wainwright Way plots is on-going, and is expected to be agreed this year. For Plot 1, the Council's developer partner has secured an end-user with contracts to be instructed later this month, subject to Council approval.

At Carl Fogarty Way, preferred bidders have been selected for Plots 1 and 4, with legals progressing and contracts expected to be exchanged by the summer. Plots 2 and 3 will also be made available this year.

Land at Partnership Way in Shadsworth Business Park has recently been disposed to GAP Plastics, the adjacent landowner, to allow their continued business expansion.

The new Blackburn Cinema and undercroft carpark is complete. Reel aim to open the cinema when Covid restrictions allow with the carpark opening in March.

New Local Plan

Works to prepare an ambitious new Local Plan for the Borough are continuing. Widespread public consultation on a draft Plan took place from 8th January until 19th February, using a wide variety of media due to COVID restrictions. The team received responses from over 950 individuals and organisations - more than ever before for a Local Plan consultation.

The responses are being reviewed over the next few months and will be reported at a future Executive Board meeting. Another consultation will take place later this year before submitting the Plan to Government for examination.

Darwen Town Deal

The Darwen Town Investment Plan was submitted to Government at the end of January which – topped up with private and council investment – could be worth more than £100m.

The Plan was developed by the Town Deal Board with support from the Council and a team of specialists. The vision, objectives and projects proposed aim to establish Darwen as highly productive and sustainable town of regional importance with a focus on town centre regeneration, new employment housing development and sporting facilities, while improving urban and green gateways linking town to the countryside.

Proposals include restoring the town's Victorian market – creating a new food hall and 'makers market' to attract visitors, funding for the Library and Library Theatre and improved car parking. Key corridors and gateways will also benefit from new investment to improve the look-and-feel of the town from both the north and south as well as funding to improve pathways and trails linking the town centre, local parks and the moors.

A new manufacturing opportunity has also been developed which would put Darwen on the map nationally, complemented by a new national innovation centre. New employment sites will generate new jobs alongside investment to unlock both new and stalled housing developments, the East Lancashire Sports Village development, and the extension of ultrafast broadband.

The Board is awaiting feedback from the Government and the timing of their decision as to Darwen's funding allocation is still uncertain but it is hoped we will hear very shortly.

Further to recent Government announcements work is underway to develop a £20M Levelling Up Fund submission for Blackburn. Further updates on this proposal and a complementary strategic transport bid will be provided to members in due course.

Townscape Heritage Project - Blakey Moor/Northgate/Lord Street West

Tender package for the construction contract at Blakey Moor Terrace is awaiting final approval from the NLHF before being issued. Once tendered, works will start as soon as possible and be on site for 12-18 months.

Works to neighbouring 29 Blakey Moor (Jubilee Pub) have started and subject to NLHF approval. The private owner plans to open a new café/restaurant early summer. Works to restore Council owned 14 and 20 Lord Street West are almost complete and will be re-occupied by Prism Studios, Prism Gallery and Super Slow Way in the next few months. Good progress is being made to bring two privately owned shops back into use at 10-12 Lord Street West and works are due to complete end of April.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COUNCILLOR JULIE GUNN

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: JAYNE IVORY
DATE: 25 March 2021

PEOPLE: A GOOD QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL OUR RESIDENTS

Children's Social Care

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

Our current figures as regards Children's Social Care statistics are as follows:

Child in Need	343
Child Protection	198
Children in our Care	373

KEY PRIORITIES

Our priorities over the past eleven months and since the onset of the pandemic has been 'Business as Usual' but we have delivered our services in different ways.

- There has remained a clear focus on our statutory services and our duty to assess, plan and intervene for all children subject to child in need plans, child protection plans and in our role as Corporate Parents. Social work staff and our support service staff have maintained direct face to face visits for those families most at risk. Our risk assessment tool focuses on gradings of Red, Amber and Green (RAG rating) where all Red risk assessed children and families receive face to face visits; Amber a blend of face to face and virtual; Green primarily virtual. This tool is totally fluid and is reviewed as cases progress within the system. Family Time for those children in care has been offered face to face to ensure that children are not deprived of their right to see their parents when it is deemed safe for them to do so. This has been well received and acknowledged by the judiciary for those children in care proceedings, in particular, where we have joined up with Lancashire and Blackpool to ensure our offer for family time is similar across the county. Some of our older teenagers have enjoyed using social media and their smart phones to stay in touch with their social workers and social workers have fed back that this communication has sometimes brought about better communication and engagement. This practice for some young people will be here to stay.
- There have remained in place strong links with our schools and settings during the past eleven months of the pandemic. Using the same risk assessment tool to determine an offer to our most vulnerable children and families has been a good example of children's social care and education colleagues working together. Social workers are now ensuring that a positive and clear message is conveyed to families that every child should be back in school from 8th March 2021 and we will do everything that is practically possible to support this.
- Work has been undertaken to further embed our Quality Assurance Framework through thematic audit activity and routine audit activity. This is key to aiding our level of understanding of both outstanding, good practice and practice, which requires improvement. Our third practice week took place in November 2020, which had a focus on the Local Authority as Corporate Parents. More recently we have undertaken a thematic audit of social work supervision and planned workshops are in place for March 2021 to embed good practice and support what is expected from managers and staff.
- Our Self Evaluation Framework was refreshed and prepared for our Ofsted conversation which took place on 24th February 2021. We had a good story to tell right across our services. We know our core business well and know where there are areas of concern and where more innovation is required. The conversation itself went well with good engagement from us all as an

SLT. Children's social care were able to demonstrate the journey we have been on to reduce caseloads/achieve timely assessments and explain our strategy to reduce the number of children in our care. As the relaxing of lockdown unfolds incrementally we are prepared for an upsurge in contacts and referrals into our Children's Advice and Duty Service (CADS) and have reflected on the impact last June when we prepared for the same thing. We expect similar patterns, but our staff are working together and will ensure the same consistent quality of service. This demand will be reviewed weekly by head of service and service manager, but CADS is fully staffed now with permanent experienced social work staff – which has taken some time to achieve.

What our data tells us

The Children's Advice and Duty Service 12 month review of the impact was formulated in January 2021. Our performance has stayed true to the model with a third less referrals being generated at the front door. Our partnerships have remained strong despite this and agencies have felt supported by the CADS offer and those rich conversations to determine threshold have been well received. This has been borne out by our feedback. Other LA's are very interested in our CADS model and some have already visited us virtually with more to follow. As CADS was implemented in November 2019 there were 1216 open safeguarding cases and in November 2020 there were 831 open safeguarding cases. Overall our front door service is deemed to be a success story and can be held as an example of good practice. A strong message remains in place to the public, and with our partners that our service is ever present, social work led and is very much accessible and open if anyone has concerns about the welfare of a child.

The timeliness of our assessments has increased to 91% a significant improvement from the average twelve months ago which was in 2019/20 61%. Our social work staff have continued to prioritise their assessments of vulnerable children and our compliance levels have increased despite the impact of Covid.

Our looked after children figure has seen a reduction from a steady 400 during the first 6 months of this year down to 373 currently. The demand for external commissioned placements has not seen any increase. This has ensured that budgetary demands have not increased and this is despite the impact of Covid. A joint commissioning strategy is now in place on a tripartite basis with health and education to support joint funding for our most complex children where this is relevant.

There has been a great deal of scrutiny and the driving of plans to ensure right across our service that the right children have the right level of intervention for the right length of time. This work has been supported by the implementation of CADS; by the strong early help offer; by the strong edge of care and adolescent offer; and by our staff ensuring cases are closed promptly or stepped down to the right type of plan to safeguard that child and family; by discharging care orders through the courts where appropriate.

ADOLESCENT SERVICES

Young People's Services:

Participation

The Youth Forum is taking part in a national NHS consultation regarding the impact of Covid on children and young people's mental health, the opportunity will also be extended to Children in Our Care and Care Leaver forums to ensure we capture voices from a wider cohort.

The Forum also met with key health professionals to discuss how they can improve the mental health and well-being of children and young people in the borough. They will be investigating mental health first aid training for young people to act as peer support within the secondary schools, youth organisations and CIOC senior and leaving care forums.

The YPS SEND (ASD) 'Kids Next Door' group have taken part in a the National Children's Bureau Consultation for Children and Young people with SEND about the impact of the pandemic. Their comments will be forwarded to the Department of Education along with their peers.

The BwD Youth Forum met with Kooth to discuss the impact of the resource in BwD. Discussions are taking place regarding the recruitment of young people to become Kooth ambassadors. They will meet again at the end of March to discuss a campaign and recruitment.

In November the National Make Your Mark results were revealed. In BwD, Support Our Mental Health and Child Poverty are the top 2 issues. The Youth MP presented the findings at the Children's Partnership Board and a meeting has been arranged to discuss how professionals and young people can support these campaigns and improve the outcomes for children and young people in the Borough.

For more information on YPS activities please see website and for regular updates see our social media campaign.

www.bwd-yps.co.uk



@bwd_yps

Detached Work

Young People's Services (YPS) have been commissioned to deliver a detached street level employability and education programme during the current restrictions. Staff from YPS, IMO and Youth Action are engaging with YP across the borough about their current status and signposting young people to a range of agreed opportunities such as Blackburn College, Prince's trust, BYZ Youth Employability Hub, Apprenticeship and employment opportunities.

YPS also coordinate a weekly detached project alongside key partners, Blackburn Rovers Community Trust and Blackburn Youth Zone, to deliver a minimum of 3 detached sessions per week. The project visits areas identified by the Police, Community Safety, Elected Members as Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) hotspots and areas where YP congregate in breach of Covid restrictions. Youth work staff educate YP on restrictions, opportunities to engage in positive activities and challenge/support them around behaviour and life choices.

SEEDS (Adolescent Support Unit):

Despite the continuing restrictions relating to Covid 19, The SEEDS has managed to engage young people by utilising virtual sessions which have included cooking, reading with young people, bike rides and supporting their emotional wellbeing. Anti-bullying Week and World Suicide Prevention Day were recognised and young people explored "be kind" skills and concepts in sessions. The SEEDS was nominated for a 'Worker Bees' Award, acknowledging the commitment and creative approach in maintaining relationships with young people irrespective of Coronavirus restrictions. Demand for both the outreach work and the short-breaks service is consistent and feedback of young people's experiences remains positive, and families/carers continue to value the services provided by the SEEDS.

Engage Team:

The Engage team have continued to achieve positive outcomes for children they support. The team have now introduced a new feedback process created in consultation with the children and families they work with, and have received fantastic feedback about the support the team provides.

The Engage Team continue to offer all of the children we support face to face visits in recognition of their wishes and the positive benefits this brings, whilst also making use of creative approaches and technology. The team continue to raise awareness of exploitation to partner agencies via training to the Police, Children's Services staff, Adolescent services and schools.

Youth Justice:

The Youth Justice Service continue to work alongside colleagues from the Community Safety Team in planning the co-funded music project delivered by charity 'We Are Noise', for young people in the Darwen area. In recognition of some of the issues of anti-social behaviour in the town during the past 18 months, through our engagement with some of the young people identified, we are aware that this resource is of genuine interest to a number of them and is regarded as a fantastic opportunity to engage them in a constructive and meaningful pastime. The commencement of this

project has so far been delayed due to the recent lockdown, however, plans remain in place for it to begin when practicable to do so.

In January, all staff at the Youth Justice Service completed Trauma Informed Practice training. Following on from the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) training rolled out across the council, the two days training delivered by a Chartered Psychologist, Forensic Child & Adolescent Specialist, built upon this foundation, providing a theoretical and research based insight into the impact of trauma upon young people. This looked at various life stages, including pre-birth, emphasising how trauma impacts upon brain development and attachments and the consequences of this in the context of the Youth Justice Service's work. The training paves the way for the service developing its assessment model and response to young people who have experienced trauma in order to better support these individuals with the aim of achieving increased engagement and better outcomes. Following this training, the Youth Justice Service Manager is contributing to the Public Health Departments review of trauma informed practice being adopted and applied in services across the borough.

PERMANENCE SERVICES

The number of children in care has reduced significantly to 373. The number of babies and very young children under 6 has seen a particular reduction. 68% of looked after children are in foster care, 74 children are in foster care with members of their own family.

Delays in court proceedings as a result of Covid from 26 weeks to 72 are creating considerable placement pressures. The fostering service continues to be able to place babies and very young children with in-house foster carers but it has become increasingly difficult to source placements through the independent fostering sector. Fostering Exchange Days between L.A's and the independent sector are now well established and we have had some success in placing a small number of 'harder to place' children. Foster carer recruitment has been significantly affected by Covid restrictions.

The influx of 14/ 15 year olds with serious mental health problems has subsided in the last month. A number have required specialist residential provision but have not been eligible for Tier 4 hospital admission. One 16 year old has been placed in secure provision.

Currently only 2 BwD children (siblings) waiting to be linked with adopters. Adoption Exchange Days which help to place older and harder to place children have been shelved due to Covid but an online version called 'link and play' has been developed and the children waiting will access this.

The improvement in placement stability achieved in the first half of the year was sustained in Quarter 3 and currently stands at 8% which is better than the national local authority average which is 11%. In January / February 2021 there was an increase in the number of foster placements which became fragile but with timely and enhanced support a number have re-stabilised.

Children in care and care leavers have been RAG rated since the start of the pandemic in March 2020 and ratings are reviewed weekly. The number of red and amber steadily increased slightly in July and August but fell in September when children returned to school and has been fairly static ever since.

Foster carers have also been RAG rated to ensure that those caring for the most complex children have been provided with the highest levels of support from the professionals involved.

For care leavers episodes of missing from home, fragile living arrangements, poor finances and poor physical and mental health are features of those RAG rated red and to a lesser degree those rated amber. The red and amber young people have had high levels of virtual support from their PA's, and visiting has continued for the most vulnerable.

Overall, care leavers have shown themselves to be very resilient and have managed to maintain college and / or training placements and remain in stable placements. However, the percentage of

care leavers who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET is a growing concern and a priority for the Leaving Care Service.

Education

To support schools and settings following the full reopening of schools at the beginning of September, a multidisciplinary Education Response Team was established comprising of colleagues from Public Health, Health and Safety, Human Resources, Education, Education Risk and Business Support. Schools have received measured, sensible and professional support to be able to help manage their complex and challenging scenarios. The team has managed over 1,400 confirmed cases in schools and settings resulting in over 13,000 children being sent home to isolate and over 1000 staff.

It is important to note since the beginning of the academic year - BwD schools were safe places to be with strong and robust infection prevention and control measures in place. During term 1 when many schools experienced high infection rates, the local authority was satisfied that schools were following the guidance, with 98% of cases due to community transmission, which was affecting pupil and staff attendance. During term 1 of this academic year there was continuous pressure on school leaders to maintain face to face teaching, exacerbated by staff absence due to the need for self-isolation.

Prior to the recent national lockdown, the vast majority of children in BwD were in school, with the overall BwD pupil attendance rate at 85.3% on the 17th December compared to the national rate of 76.7%. In total schools reported 389,740 lost days of education since the start of the academic year. This equates to an average of nearly 15 days per pupil. The rate for pupils with a social worker was 74.2% on the 17th December. Attendance of pupils with an EHCP was nearly 10% above the national average on the 17th following extensive work with schools to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils are attending school wherever possible. There were 1,661 pupils absent for COVID related reasons on the 17th December, down from a high of 3,529 in mid-November. This is primarily due to pupils having to isolate following contact with positive cases. Teachers and support staff have also been affected, with 8% absent on the 17th December. This had also fallen since mid-November, when up to 13% of all staff were unable to attend school, having an impact on the ability to deliver lessons in some settings. In December over 90% of schools reported that they had remote learning in place and over half were delivering more than 4 hours of content every day, and three quarters delivering at least three hours every day. Immediately after the Christmas break, 100% of schools reported that they were able to provide the minimum amount of remote learning to those pupils not on site.

Following the national lockdown on an average day, just under 15% of all pupils are in school in BwD, very slightly above the national rate. This varies by phase, with around 22% of Primary pupils and about a quarter of pupils in Special and alternative provision being educated on site, but only about 5% of mainstream Secondary pupils. Less than 3% of pupils in Independent provision are in school. Pupils with an EHCP are significantly more likely to be in school in BwD (43%) than their peers nationally (35%). Attendance of pupils with a Social Worker in BwD (39%) is broadly in line with the National average of 41%. In both cases, there is less variation by phase, although primary and special schools pupils with additional vulnerabilities are still a little more likely to be educated on site than secondary pupils. About two-thirds of children of critical workers identified by schools are taking up school places. These represent the largest number of pupils on site, about 2500 of the 3200 attending each day. There are approximately 400 children with an EHCP and 300 with a Social Worker on an average day. As on 2nd March attendance data was:

	National	BwD
Overall attendance	19.2	19.9
EHCP	48.5	62
Social worker	53	54.3

The schools effectiveness team throughout lockdown have worked with all schools and settings within BwD to monitor attendance and remote learning of our vulnerable learners. Working directly with colleagues in social care as needs arise.

Since the announcement of the wider school opening on March 8th – the Education response team have worked with schools and setting to ensure they are fully prepared. A full headteachers briefing was held with the Education response team, health and safety, HR and Education leads within the council to ensure all school leaders were fully prepared for March 8th. To date there has been no reports from schools or setting not able to follow government guidelines for the wider opening of schools and settings from March 8th. Attendance of our vulnerable learners will continue to be monitored in the initial stages of the wider re-opening of schools and settings.

The collective work together with all schools and settings, the education team and wider council continues to be a strength during the pandemic.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

COUNCILLOR JIM SMITH

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: MARTIN EDEN
DATE: 25 MARCH 2021**

REFUSE/ RECYCLING COLLECTION

The subscription process for the garden waste service has seen our biggest ever uptake for the £25 early bird offer (a saving of £5 on the £30 fee) with over 10,000 subscribers signing up to the service. Prior to this year's subscription, the highest number of subscribers for this time of the year was just over 9,000. During 2020, we eventually had over 14,000 subscribers sign up for the garden waste collections.

During the current lockdown restriction period, tonnages collected have significantly increased, with the crews collecting up to an additional 15% more general waste, as more people are at home. Despite this significant increased tonnage, during the recent period of bad weather, they have continued to complete their tasks, despite the elements and the increased workload.

The refuse and recycling crews visit all parts of the borough, so are an integral part of the community, the following two recent examples show how they do much more than remove waste and recycling.

Whilst emptying the burgundy general waste bins, one of the crews recently witnessed a car being driven erratically, as it had turned on to a nearby road and came to a stop. The crew knew something was wrong and rushed to car, but were unable to get any response from the driver. They acted swiftly by calling the emergency services, requesting an ambulance, whilst keeping the driver safe and comfortable until the emergency services had arrived. The paramedics who had attended have praised the crew for acting quickly, as the driver was seriously ill and needed emergency treatment and was lucky that they had acted the way they did. The driver's daughter also emailed to express her thanks for the swift actions of the crew.

Additionally, a second recent call was received thanking another collection team. The thanks relate to the crew and specifically the driver, who on each collection cycle, wave at the resident's young son, who has non-verbal autism. The son waits for the crew on collection day for when they come down the street. The crew wave at his young son and it "makes him smile so much". The father who made the call stated, "It's only a small gesture, but to my son it's huge! Please say thank you to them for him"

PUBLIC PROTECTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Public Protection continues to be heavily involved with covid-19 enforcement, and is preparing for the gradual reopening of businesses as we follow the roadmap. In the period January to March 2021 the Service has

- Carried out 772 compliance checks
- Dealt with 333 complaints
- Handled 47 requests for advice
- Carried out 297 doorstep test and trace visits
- Advised 32 businesses following an outbreak
- Reviewed compliance across faith settings

The work has been supported by the Corporate Health and Safety Team, whose assistance has been invaluable. The Health and Safety Executive has also carried out 168 telephone spot checks on businesses as part of our second tranche of HSE spot checks; where the telephone conversation indicates support is needed, a personal visit will be carried out by the HSE or Public Protection. In general compliance has been good but 1 FPN for £1000 have been issued for non-compliance.

Specific projects have been carried out in relation to the gym sector, and supermarkets, and one live investigation is underway where a warrant will be executed under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984.

The Food Safety Team has been able to recommence food safety inspections, and the Licensing Team is supporting the issue of support grants to the taxi trade. Public Protection is coordinating a multi-agency response involving the Police and officers from the Youth Support Team to address non-compliance amongst the public.

Work is now focussing the 12th April, when most retail will be opening (including licensed premises serving alcohol outdoors only). This period is expected to be extremely busy for Public Protection. The Service is also contributing to wider LRF work in the Business Compliance Cell to develop comprehensive advice and support resources for trade sectors.

PARKING SERVICES

The following Council Owned Car parks being used for Covid-Related services:

Old Bank Lane

Old Bank Lane car park since the 6th July has been used as a regional testing centre and has the capacity to provide up to 1000 tests per day.

Simmons St

Simmons St is being used as a vaccination car park for anyone who attending the vaccination centre based within Barbara CastleWay Health Centre.

Weir St and Penny St

Both of these car parks are being used as a vaccination car park for anyone who will be using the vaccination centre based within Blackburn Cathedral.

Bank Bottoms

This car park is the vaccination car park for anyone who will be using the vaccination centre based in Darwen Health Centre.

Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) Car Parks

ANPR technology is being installed in Feilden Street MSCP and the new undercroft car park in Blackburn Town Centre and will be operational on the 15th March 2021. This technology will allow the car park to operate staff free with payment on exit via the number plate. It will allow longer operating hours with the car parks being managed remotely.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH & WELLBEING

COUNCILLOR DAMIAN TALBOT

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTORS: DOMINIC HARRISON &
MARTIN EDEN
DATE: 25 March 2021**

PEOPLE: A good quality of life for all our residents

Public Health

Update on the Mental Wellbeing programme

The mental wellbeing programme has continued to progress and has gained real impetus during the covid pandemic, as the issues of isolation, anxiety, depression and bereavement have become more prominent during and another lockdown.

Recent developments in public health have included:

- The appointment of a public health development manager to support this work on a full time basis.
- The development of an Lancashire wide elected member 'mental health champion' group
- The Blackburn mental wellbeing group continues to meet bi-monthly, engaging our commissioned services and voluntary sector partners
- A task and finish group has been set up to run a campaign around the '5 Ways to wellbeing' for 5 weeks, in May as restrictions start to be eased.

Recent development in our mental wellbeing commissioned services have included:

- The Flourishing Minds project, provided by Lancashire Mind, continues to provide one to one wellbeing coaching, as well as off one sessions on the 5 ways to wellbeing, stress and sleep.
- The Men in Sheds programme, provided by Blackburn Rover community Trust, have recently restarted their support for older men – the project will be based at Ewood Park and they are working with Blackburn College to build raised bed for food growing.
- Time to Change, provided by Lancashire Mind, are currently looking at a legacy plan for the anti-stigma work they have been doing as the national Time to Change programme ends on the 31st of March. They worked with partners to promote 'Time to Talk Day' on the 6th of February.
- Re-align Futures, who provide mental health and suicide prevention training, are currently looking to restore face to face training opportunities for mental health first aid and a new 'Connect 5' training offer.
- Together all continues to be a popular online wellbeing offer, with on average 25 new registrations a month.

Leisure Services

Although facilities have remained closed with the most recent national lockdown, Leisure Services staff have been utilised across a wide range of council departments to support the local Covid response.

With the national roadmap now in place, Leisure Services will begin to operate outdoor and indoor facilities at timescales dictated by national and local guidance. Outdoor organised activities are due to commence 29th March with individual indoor leisure restarting from 12th

April 2021. School swimming will restart week commencing 15th March 2021. Customer engagement will increase in the coming weeks ahead of reopening phases to encourage people to return when appropriate.

Staff will begin returning to the service ahead of restarting to ensure robust planning and preparations can take place ahead of reopening. Significant experience of teams supporting Lateral Flow Testing across the borough will be valuable to provide additional safety measures as services restart.

Healthy Lifestyles & Wellbeing Service

The Wellbeing Service continues to be the point of contact for the public and partners to access health and wellbeing support locally as well as providing a critical link across the broader Leisure, Health and Wellbeing offer. As part of the Wellbeing Service, Health Trainers are supporting internal staff as well as residents to make lasting lifestyle changes, positively affecting physical and mental wellbeing. These teams also form the core of the local Contact Tracing management and capacity.

re:refresh delivery teams continue to deliver a broad range of live streaming and online support sessions and are now preparing to recommence outdoor based activities in line with the government road map dates. Witton Park Cycle Centre is planned on reopening week commencing 15th March and organised outdoor group activities such as wellbeing walks or parent and toddler sessions, planned to restart from 29th March 2021.

Blackburn with Darwen is a part of the Sport England Local Delivery Pilot, called Together an Active Future (TaAF) operating across Pennine Lancashire. TaAF want more people to be more active, improve mental wellbeing and help people live happier, healthier lives.

So far, there has been over £115,000 invested across four local organisations/partnerships to test and deliver targeted health and physical activity projects, helping to understand how we can improve the health and activity of residents for the long term.

Libraries

Census 21: A successful application for Census Support Centre funding has enabled the Borough's Library Service to be part of the national network of site based Advisors helping residents to access and complete the Census 2021.

From early March households were invited to complete the census questionnaire, which generates vital information and shapes important decisions and planning on local services. Although the emphasis is on digital completion, paper copies are available on request.

Library staff have received census training and are able to provide help as needed, from guiding someone through the form to completing it on their behalf. Despite lockdown restrictions being in place at the onset of the census period, face to face support and access to onsite IT facilities for independent use has been available from Blackburn Library, Darwen Library and Audley and Queens Park Neighbourhood Learning Centre via Advisors from the Adult Learning Team. Support is by appointment to ensure we operate safely and in line with Covid hygiene guidance. Telephone support is also available for those who are unable to visit. After Census Day on March 21st, an ONS Census Field Team will follow up with those households who have not completed their questionnaire, directing residents to the library service if supported is needed. The census collection period will end on 4th May.

Read, Talk, Share: The Library Service has secured £10k funding from The Reading Agency to use the proven power of reading to tackle loneliness and support mental health as part of Blackburn with Darwen's Covid 19 recovery. At a time when people are unable to meet up we

know that isolation is particularly damaging to wellbeing and for those without access to digital communications the impact can be far worse. The Reading Friends programme is designed to start conversations and connect those who are lonely and isolated by providing devices and the necessary digital support to enable people to take part in virtual Reading Friends groups. Library staff will work with a wide range of partners and community groups to ensure maximum reach and take-up across borough.

Learn English: Delivery of the project is well underway, supporting students to take part in virtual social mixing, make new friends and experience some of services and resources offered by the library. As Covid restrictions are eased the programme will move to site based activity.

Arts & Heritage

Whilst being closed to the public there has been lots of work supporting schools and education from Blackburn Museum and Turton Tower. This year instead of holding our normal science week in the Museum we have taken it virtual. With a series of sessions developed around the Museum collections, all designed to meet aspects of the school curriculum and to get children enthused about science including inventors, minibeasts, fossils and forces streamed from the galleries straight into classrooms and homes. The sessions reached over 1800 children from across the borough and wider Lancashire.

Whilst at Turton Tower they have been developing their youtube channel which now holds a series of films supporting the curriculum all about Tudor and Victorian life. The films have been a great success with over 600 views each in January 2021. The team are now looking to develop a series on Shakespeare and the grounds.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH & ADULT SOCIAL CARE COUNCILLOR MUSTAFA DESAI

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING DIRECTORS:
SAYYED OSMAN (ADULT SOCIAL CARE & PREVENTION)**

DATE: 25 March 2021

CHANGES TO SHIELDING

More people in Blackburn with Darwen are being advised to shield, following a change to the model the government uses to identify people who are at greater risk of complications from Coronavirus.

The change affects an estimated 1.7 million people in England. Around 5,200 BwD residents aged over 18 have been added to the Shielded Persons List.

These residents have received letters from the Department of Health & Social Care, advising them to stay at home until 31 March. They have also been prioritised for vaccination.

We have contacted all of those people added to the list with information about the Help Hub so we can help support them to stay at home and stay safe.

The shielding period for existing Clinically Extremely Vulnerable people has also been extended to 31 March.

COVID ENGAGEMENT

On the 13th January it was confirmed that Blackburn with Darwen was one of 60 local authorities to be awarded funding through the Covid Community Champions fund.

This funding will allow us to develop “Champions” who will support us to engage with communities most at risk from long-term impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic.

We’re already working to identify local organisations who can support us to deliver targeted engagement particularly with BAME residents and residents with disabilities, as a key part of our COVID-19 recovery plan. We’ll also be supporting the Strategic Youth Alliance to undertake more targeted outreach with young people. This work will help to deliver key public health messages and accurate health information, supporting people to identify myths and misinformation and adopt safer behaviours – and ultimately to save lives.

Our next step will be to identify individual Community Champions who can help us to communicate key messages within their family, neighbourhood and friendship groups. As well as being given key public health messaging, they’ll receive regular briefings and have the opportunity to raise questions and concerns with our DPH and other experts relevant to the issues we face as we move through the coming weeks and months.

Digital Initiatives with the Adult Learning Service

The Adult Learning team received money to support a Digital Buddies project which is a collaboration with the Lancashire Volunteer Partnership and Adult Learning. This aims to help people stay connected with family and friends and continue learning. The money is being used to supply a number of devices to help people get online, learn the basics, stay safe online and also attend Adult Learning courses. A collaboration with local business 6GInternet also supports those people without connectivity to access WiFi for 1 year.

The project also aims to help combat loneliness through regular phone calls from our digital volunteers. The digital buddies will help people use their device, troubleshoot any problems

they are having with their equipment and generally help build their confidence with the device, using the internet or social media.

The team has also been part of a project to provide and use technology to increase physical activity and support the wellbeing of local residents living in care homes, providing much needed social interaction and stimulus to a group of people who have been excluded from society for almost a year. The virtual craft sessions provide new, dementia friendly learning activities for residents to access and participate.

The aim of the craft activities was not only to provide some fun and entertainment to residents but also to help their long term memory through reminiscing, and practical activities to support their motor skills. Enjoying a singalong together helped to enhance the senses in the brain that remain with dementia sufferers the longest following a diagnosis of dementia.

TROUBLED FAMILIES PROGRAMME

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) have confirmed funding for the Troubled Families Programme for 2021/22, this acknowledges the success of the programme to date, and the hard work of authorities, multi-agency partners as well as hundreds of thousands of families. MHCLG have commenced consultation processes to co-design and implement further improvements to the programme for any subsequent years. The Troubled Families programme supports the delivery of Early Help Family Support in Children's Services and Prevention & Neighbourhoods Services to support improved sustainable outcomes for local vulnerable families. For 2020/21 the Payment by Results element of the programme for 280 positive outcomes for families is on-track to be achieved despite Covid-19 challenges on service delivery.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE NEIGHBOURHOODS TEAMS

The Adult Social Care Neighbourhood teams continue to fulfil our statutory responsibilities under the Care Act. They work collaboratively with Partner agencies to meet the health and care needs of our most vulnerable residents. Where appropriate, digital solutions have supported virtual meetings and reduced face to face contacts in line with Covid restrictions, enabling necessary support and interventions to continue throughout the Pandemic. The needs and circumstances that residents experience have become more complex and subsequently the requirement to provide an immediate response has increased. For example, residents are experiencing increased needs linked to carer breakdown or a deterioration in their physical and mental well-being that requires immediate assessment and support. Our teams follow all government and organisational advice in respect of social distancing and PPE, enabling critical interventions to be carried out safely. Following the successful roll out of the vaccination programme residents now appear more willing to have professional input within their homes. Winter pressure monies have been utilised to increase social work capacity in the interim and recruitment activity has taken place throughout the winter period.

The Independent Living Service further supports people in their own homes via our Occupational Therapy, Moving and Handling and Sensory Impairment offer. Progressing the distribution of the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) has been particularly challenging over the last 12 months as shielding and social distancing restrictions have made adaptations to individual's properties difficult to achieve. It is anticipated however that following operational developments such as the recent increase in Occupational Therapy capacity and the

relocation of the building surveyors into the team, the DFG programme will continue to progress successfully.

INTERMEDIATE TIER/HOSPITAL DISCHARGE TEAMS

The Hospital Discharge, Reablement and Home First teams continue to fulfil our statutory responsibilities and are successfully meeting increasing demand for services, particularly for those being discharged from Hospital. The complexity of need of local people being referred into services has increased and the teams are now supporting residents who are experiencing a greater level of illness and frailty than was the case prior to Covid 19. This has led to more people requiring increased interventions from both health and social care services.

The continued collaboration with our system partners remains an important feature of all the work we do and is key to enabling safe decision making with and on behalf of the residents of our borough to ensure safe discharges from hospital. Home First principles continue to inform our practice and the Multi-Disciplinary triage within Intermediate Tier enables people to receive the right level of care whilst encouraging independence. The emerging developments that support the new Hospital Discharge Guidance (launched in September 2020 in response to Covid) will continue to shape discharge services going forward and our teams are central to ensuring the success of this work.

Mobilisation plans for the new Intermediate Care service at Albion Mill are progressing well. This innovative scheme is due to open next month and will see Health and Social Care working together seamlessly to make a real difference to the lives of local people. In addition to Intermediate Care services, Albion Mill will also provide Extra Care Housing and neighbourhood activities via the Community Hub.

SPECIALIST SERVICES

The Specialist Services Social Work Teams (Safeguarding, Learning Disability, Mental Health and Emergency Duty Team) continue to work persistently, flexibly and creatively, to ensure that our vulnerable residents are supported and safeguarded and that we fulfil our statutory duties.

Demand has increased for each of these teams and they have responded accordingly whilst also recognising that their own safety, wellbeing and resilience are important factors. Protection and support through appropriate use of PPE, access to a range of emotional health and wellbeing opportunities and strong leadership, continues to be in place for all of the teams.

The Learning Disability Team continues to work with providers to ensure that people with a Learning Disability/Autism are supported and protected. In addition, they are currently liaising with Providers and public health colleagues to ensure that residents with LD/Autism are prioritised appropriately in the vaccination roll out. The team continues to provide regular advice and support to families who have been struggling to care for their family members due to the Covid restrictions. The resumption of day care services alongside our respite support options have provided important support to both individuals and families.

The Community Mental Health Team continues to see a significant rise in referrals into the service due to the negative impact that the Covid situation has had on local people, some of whom, have never been known to mental health services before. For many people, the restrictions have exacerbated issues regarding isolation and vulnerability and affected their mental health and emotional wellbeing. The number of mental health act assessments and

people needing to be detained in hospital under the Mental Health Act legislation has also increased. Although very busy, the team has successfully managed these pressures and current capacity planning will support the management of increased demand going forward.

COUNTER EXTREMISM

The National Counter Extremism Programme is under review from the Home office as it is at the end of its 5 year strategy cycle, running from 2015-20. Feedback to date is a recommendation the programme widens its scope with a greater focus on wider crime and social harms that can lead to extremism, with a particular focus on hate crime. The counter extremism co-ordinator based in Blackburn with Darwen has been working with key stakeholders in advance of such feedback to increase the reporting of hate crime across all communities and to build trust and confidence in the process, in particular responses to concerns raised across public agencies. There have been 347 hate crimes and 115 hate incidents record in Blackburn with Darwen between February 2020 and the end of January 2021, this despite being under COVID restrictions.

We have also been working towards improving the advice, guidance support offered to victims of hate crime, to include restorative justice approaches. BwD is also working closely with partners on the development of improved intervention and prevention programmes to improve rehabilitation of offenders where hate was a factor.

Blackburn with Darwen, as is the case nationally, has seen an increase in online hate crime through social media. In response we are working with the local Football club, partners, community groups and charities to advance our programs, enforcement, intervention, prevention and as well as activity and promotion of Hate Crime awareness, to include key sporting events.

Away from Hate Crime, the Counter Extremism co-ordinator has also been working to establish resilience towards toxic and damaging misinformation and narratives. A number of webinars have been held with key stakeholders addressing anti-minority narratives and negative Covid Narratives, supporting objective and effective challenges to them.

STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING & FINANCE

We continue to work closely with the Regulated Care, Domiciliary Care and supported living sector to support them throughout the pandemic and to ensure the Care sector remains supported and viable. Whilst good progress is being made with vaccinations across the care sector, care providers are continuing to implement latest guidance around Infection Prevention Control, visiting and so on. We continue to work with providers to monitor Covid outbreaks and incidences. The Daily welfare calls to providers have continued to complete the tracker and maintain up to date situation reports for the Care Sector and the dedicated Care Sector Response Group for all Covid 19 issues within the care sector continue to respond as needed, providing a situation report in line with the Council's Incident Management Reporting. The group are also co-ordinating and monitoring take up of vaccinations for care home staff and residents, and all staff across the wider Care Sector as the vaccination programme is rolled out.

The second round of the Infection Control Fund (IPC), the Rapid Testing Grant and the Workforce Capacity Grant have all been issued to providers in line with Government requirements and monthly returns in respect of the usage of these funds are being submitted to the DHSC.

In addition the Strategic Commissioning team are now engaging with our care providers to negotiate and agree the annual uplifts in provider fees for 2021/22 following delegated decision from Finance Council.