

Public Document Pack

Council Forum

Thursday, 22nd July, 2021
6.00 pm
Blackburn King George's Hall

AGENDA

1. **Welcome and Apologies**
2. **Prayers by the Mayor's Chaplain**
3. **Minutes Of The Previous Meeting**
Annual Council Minutes May 2021 5 - 14
Appendix 1 and 2
APPENDIX 3
4. **Declarations of Interest**
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FORM 15
5. **Presentation of Past Mayor's Badges**
6. **Mayoral Communications**
7. **Council Forum**
To consider any questions from members of the public under Procedure Rule 12.
8. **Motions**
To consider any Motions submitted under Procedure Rule 10. Two Motions have been submitted as follows:

MOTION 1

This Council wishes to record its support for the Boundary Commission for England proposal for new boundaries for the Blackburn Parliamentary constituency contained in the recent report setting out plans to improve the equalisation of the size of parliamentary constituencies. This proposal, which is identical to that presented in 2018 and supported by this Council at that time, will bring into the Blackburn constituency the significant remaining proportion of the Blackburn South and Lower Darwen ward as well as small

parts of Ewood Ward, currently situated in the Rossendale and Darwen constituency, including areas in close proximity to Ewood Park which are a core part of the public perception of what constitutes Blackburn. This Council supports the view of the Commission that the M65 motorway logically forms the boundary between Blackburn constituency and Darwen and also rectifies the fact that two wards are currently split across two constituencies which goes against the general principles of the Boundary Commission.

The Council agrees for the Chief Executive to respond to the Boundary Commission for England consultation, confirming the Council's support to the proposals for new boundaries for the Blackburn Parliamentary constituency.

Proposer: Cllr Phil Riley
Seconder: Cllr Damian Talbot

MOTION 2

The Government published a White Paper - "*Planning For the Future*" in August 2020 setting out wide-ranging and radical proposals to reform the planning system. Whilst the Council welcomes the aim to simplify the planning system it is particularly concerned about the proposal to remove local residents' right to object to individual planning applications in their own neighbourhood if the area is zoned for growth or renewal. This is a threat to their long-established democratic right and the Council wishes to safeguard the principle of protecting residents' right to have a say over individual planning applications in their own area.

The Council believes planning works best when developers and the local community work together to shape local areas and deliver necessary new homes; and therefore calls on the Government to protect the right of communities to object to individual planning applications.

Proposer: Cllr Phil Riley
Seconder: Cllr Dave Smith

- | | | |
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| 9. | Mayoralty 2022/23 | |
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| 10. | Appointment of Monitoring Officer/Appointment of Section 151 Officer and Updating of the Constitution | |
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14.	Questions from Members	
	To consider any questions received from Members under Procedure Rule 11.	

Denise Park, Chief Executive

ANNUAL COUNCIL **Thursday 20th May 2021**

PRESENT – *Councillors Akhtar, H, Akhtar P, Baldwin, Desai M, Desai S, Fielding, Floyd, Gee, Gunn, Hardman, Humphrys, Hussain I, Hussain M, Irfan, Jan- Virmani, Khan M, Khan Z, Khonat, Liddle, Mahmood, Marrow, Patel Ab, Patel Al, Rawat, Riley, Russell, Salton, Shorrock, Sidat, Slater Jacq, Slater Jo, Slater Ju, Slater N, Smith D, Smith J, Talbot, Taylor, Walker and Whittle.*

RESOLUTIONS

1 Welcome and Apologies

The Chief Executive read out the notice convening the meeting and apologies were received from Councillors Bateson, Brookfield, Browne, Casey, Connor, Fazal, Harling, Hussain S, McFall, McGurk, Oates, and Rigby.

2 The Election of Mayor 2021/2022

The Chief Executive asked for nominations for the Office of Mayor of the Borough for the ensuing Council year. Councillor Derek Hardman was nominated for Office and declared elected as the Mayor of the Borough for the 2021/2022 Municipal Year.

(The Mayor in the Chair).

3 The Election of Deputy Mayor 2021/2022

The Chief Executive asked for nominations for the Office of Deputy Mayor of the Borough for the 2021/2022 Council year. Councillor Suleman Khonat was nominated for Office and the Mayor declared him elected as Deputy Mayor of the Borough for the 2021/2022 Municipal Year.

4 Tribute to the newly elected Mayor

Councillors Paul Marrow and Mohammed Khan paid tribute to the newly elected Mayor. The Mayor responded and returned thanks for his election.

5 Minutes of the Council Forum Meeting held on 25th March 2021

RESOLVED - The Minutes of the Council Forum Meeting held on 25th March 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

6 Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were received.

7 Election Results – May 2021

The Mayor reminded Members that the results of the recent Election were available on the Council website.

8 Motion on Human Rights in Palestine

A motion was submitted as follows:

Council notes with great concern the blatant disregard for human rights by Israeli forces in the occupied Palestinian lands with aerial/ground attacks against innocent civilians.

Council notes the state sanctioned forced evictions of Palestinians from their homes contrary to international law.

Council is concerned that HM government has not spoken out against these attacks on the human rights and safety of civilians.

Council resolves to:

- 1) Write to the prime minister & foreign secretary demanding immediate condemnation by HM government against the actions of Israeli forces.*
- 2) Ask HM government to raise this at the United Nations Security Council and seek sanctions against the government of Israel for these blatant breaches of international law.*

Moved by: Cllr Quesir Mahmood

Seconded by : Cllr Phil Riley

Members debated the Motion. Councillor John Slater advised that his Group would support the Motion if the words 'of all violence' 'and' were inserted into Resolution 1, the wording would now read:

- 1) Write to the prime minister & foreign secretary demanding immediate condemnation by HM government of all violence and against the actions of Israeli forces.*

Councillor Quesir Mahmood as Mover of the Motion accepted this change, and Council agreed that the Motion as altered was now the Substantive Motion.

The Motion, as altered was put to the Vote and was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED – That the Motion be carried.

9 Council Appointments for 2021/2022

The Chief Executive referred to her report on the allocation of seats and appointments to Council positions for 2021/2022.

The first draft of the Council Appointments list for 2020/21 was circulated.

Councillor John Slater advised this his Group was not happy with the allocation of Chair and Vice Chair positions to his Group, and had therefore only put forward a limited number of nominations.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That Council notes the appointment of the Executive Board Members;
- 2) That appointments be made to the positions detailed in Paragraph 2, subsection 3;
- 3) That Council note the provisions relating to political balance, referred to in Paragraph 3; and
- 4) That decisions on the remaining appointment of Members to Committees be delegated to the Group Leaders to agree the appointments.

10 Mayoralty 2021/2022

Members received a report which confirmed the arrangements for the Mayoralty in 2021/2022, namely that Councillor Derek Hardman be appointed as Mayor and Councillor Suleman Khonat be appointed as Deputy Mayor for 2021/2022.

Council was advised that a report on the future rotation agreement for the Mayoralty from 2023/2024 onwards would be submitted during the new Municipal Year.

RESOLVED –

The Annual Council:

1. Confirms the appointment of Councillor Derek Hardman as Mayor of the Borough for 2021/22;
2. Confirms that in accordance with the rotation arrangements agreed at Annual Council in May 2018 that it is the Labour Group's turn to nominate the Deputy Mayor for 2021/22 and notes the appointment made earlier in the meeting of Councillor Suleman Khonat; and
3. Notes that a report on the future rotation agreement for the Mayoralty from 2023/2024 onwards will be submitted during the new Municipal Year.

11 Appointments to Various Bodies, Groups and Panels 2021/22

The Chief Executive submitted a report on the appointment to various Bodies, Groups and Panels for 2021/2022.

Due to the need to make early appointments to the Lancashire Combined Fire Authority and the Lancashire Police and Crime Panel, the Leader moved that in terms of the Fire Authority, that Councillors Dave Smith and Zamir Khan be nominated from the Labour Group, and that the remaining place be nominated by the Conservative Group. Councillor Khan also advised that Councillor Quesir Mahmood had been nominated to serve on the Lancashire Police and Crime Panel.

Councillor Dave Smith, seconded by Councillor Damian Talbot, moved that Councillor Jean Rigby be nominated as the Conservative representative to the Lancashire Combined Fire Authority, based on her previous experience in the role.

Councillor John Slater requested that he be given chance to agree a Conservative nomination, as he was aware of other circumstances, but was advised that as the matter had been moved and seconded it had to be voted on, and following the vote it was agreed that Councillor Jean Rigby be confirmed as the Conservative representative on the Fire Authority.

RESOLVED –

4.1 That in the first instance, (as is usual practice) each of the organisations listed on the outside bodies, and partnership bodies list is contacted to establish;

That their Terms Of Reference / Articles Of Association have not changed and still require Council Representation in the same capacity, for the same tenure, and what added value will be mutually brought by such engagement. Subject to which;

4.2 That following the process outlined in Section 3 above, nominations will be confirmed as the Council's representatives to serve until the end of the current Municipal Year; or if a longer period of office is shown, until that date; unless during the Municipal Year the Leader amends the appointments to take account of changed requirements;

4.3 That fifteen Members be appointed to serve on the panel of Members to deal with appeals; and

4.4 That as is usual practice, the decisions on representation be delegated to the Group Leaders to agree the appointments;

4.5 That the appointments to the Lancashire Fire Authority and Lancashire Police and Crime Panel be agreed.

Signed at a meeting of the Council Forum
On Thursday 22nd July 2021
(being the ensuing meeting on the Council) by

MAYOR

COUNCIL APPOINTMENTS FOR 2021/2022

This is the pro-forma for appointments in 2021/2022

The Executive Members and Assistant Executive Members

EXECUTIVE BOARD		
Leader of the Council and Chair of Executive Board	Mohammed Khan	
The following appointments have been made by the Leader of the Council:		
Deputy Leaders of the Council	1: Phil Riley (senior) 2: Qesir Mahmood	
Vice Chair of Executive Board	Phil Riley	
PORTFOLIOS	Executive Member	Assistant Executive Member
Adult Services & Prevention	Mustafa Desai	Jackie Floyd Shaukat Hussain Iftakhar Hussain
Public Health & Wellbeing	Damian Talbot	Brian Taylor Zamir Khan
Children's, Young People & Education	Julie Gunn	Maureen Bateson Abdul Patel Patricia McFall
Environmental Services	Jim Smith	Jim Casey TBC
Growth & Development	Phil Riley	Zainab Rawat Jim Shorrocks
Digital & Customer Services	Qesir Mahmood	Salim Sidat
Finance & Governance	Vicky McGurk	Ron Whittle Mahfooz Hussain
The remainder of appointments are for completion by the Group Leaders.		

Opposition Member on Executive Board

John Slater

4. Appoint Members of Committees

Committee	Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem	IND
Policy & Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Membership Chair Dave Harling Vice-Chair: Kevin Connor	Dave Harling Kevin Connor Sylvia Liddle Zainab Rawat Abdul Patel Jackie Floyd Shaukat Hussain Maureen Bateson			
Place - Overview and Scrutiny Committee Membership Chair Suleman Khonat Vice Chair Brian Taylor	Suleman Khonat Tony Humphry Zamir Khan Janes Oates Patricia McFall Salim Sidat Brian Taylor Jim Casey			
People Overview and Scrutiny Committee Membership Chair Sylvia Liddle Vice-Chair Ron Whittle	Sylvia Liddle Ron Whittle Parwaiz Akhtar Katrina Fielding Dave Smith Mohammed Irfan Mahfooz Hussain Hussain Akhtar			
Call In Committee Membership Chair Kevin Connor				

Committee	Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem	IND
Planning & Highways Committee Membership Chair Dave Smith Vice-Chair Hussain Akhtar	Dave Smith Hussain Akhtar Samim Desai Suleman Khonat Zamir Khan Jim Casey Dave Harling Phil Riley	Jacqueline Slater Jon Baldwin Paul Marrow	Paul Browne	Yusuf Jan Virmani
Licensing Committee Membership Chair Parwaiz Akhtar Vice-Chair Stephanie Brookfield	Parwaiz Akhtar Stephanie Brookfield Samim Desai Brian Taylor Mahfooz Hussain Jim Casey Katrina Fielding	Altaf Patel Denise Gee Lilian Salton		Tasleem Fazal
Audit and Governance Committee Membership Chair: Ron Whittle Vice Chair: Mahfooz Hussain	Ron Whittle Mahfooz Hussain Maureen Bateson Abdul Patel	Neil Slater Jon Baldwin		
Standards Committee Membership Chair Tony Humphrys Vice-Chair	Sylvia Liddle Mohammed Irfan Jim Casey Ron Whittle Zainab Rawat Tony Humphrys Samim Desai			
Health & Wellbeing Board Membership Chair: Mohammed Khan	Mohammed Khan Julie Gunn Mustafa Desai Damian Talbot			

APPOINTMENT TO GROUPS AND PANELS

Committee	Labour	Opposition
Appeals Panel Membership 15		
Chief Executive's Employment Committee Membership 4	Mohammed Khan Phil Riley Qesir Mahmood	John Slater
Chief Officer's Employment Committee Membership 4	Mohammed Khan Phil Riley Qesir Mahmood	John Slater

The Membership of the Chief Executive and Chief Officer Employment Committees is the Leader of the Council, the two Deputy Leaders and the Leader of the Opposition.

The appointments within Political Groups

LABOUR GROUP	Councillors
Leader	Mohammed Khan
Deputy Leaders	Phil Riley(Senior) Qesir Mahmood
CONSERVATIVE GROUP	Councillors
Leader	John Slater
Deputy Leaders	Denise Gee (Senior) Paul Marrow

Shadow Cabinet	Shadow Executive Member	Shadow Assistant Executive Member
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Adult Services & Prevention	Jacqueline Slater	Mark Russell
Public Health & Wellbeing	Kevin Connor	Julie Slater
Children's, Young People & Education	Lilian Salton	Denise Gee
Environmental Services	Jean Rigby	Altaf Patel
Growth & Development	Paul Marrow	John Slater
Digital & Customer Services	Julie Slater	Jacqueline Slater
Finance & Governance	Neil Slater	Jon Baldwin
Opposition Committee Spokespersons		
Planning & Highways	Paul Marrow	
Licensing	Denise Gee	

APPENDIX 3

Note: As a matter of record the following Members have undertaken training in these disciplines and are therefore able to sit or substitute on Planning and Highways or Licensing Committee during the next Municipal Year 2021/22:

Planning and Highways

Councillors Akhtar H, Akhtar P, Baldwin, Bateson, Brookfield, Browne, Casey, Desai S, Fielding, Floyd, Harling, Hussain I, Hussain M, Hussain S, Jan-Virmani, Khan Z, Khonat, Liddle, Mahmood, Marrow, Oates, Rawat, Riley, Russell, Sidat, Slater Jacq, Slater Jo, Slater Ju, Slater N, Smith D and Whittle.

Licensing

Councillors Akhtar H, Akhtar P, Baldwin, Bateson, Brookfield, Casey, Desai S, Fazal, Fielding, Gee, Humphrys, Hussain M, Hussain S, Jan-Virmani, Khan Z, Khonat, Liddle, Salton, Sidat, Slater Jo, and Taylor.

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: **22nd JULY 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 TO: COUNCIL FORUM
FROM: CHIEF EXECUTIVE
DATE: 22 JULY 2021

PORTFOLIOS AFFECTED: All

WARDS AFFECTED: All

TITLE OF REPORT THE MAYORALTY – from 2022/23

1. PURPOSE

To consider arrangements for the Mayoralty in the next 5 years to facilitate nominations to office of Deputy Mayor by the Annual Council in May 2022.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council:

Agrees the rotation arrangements for the nomination of future Mayors and Deputy Mayors as set out in this report

3. BACKGROUND

Annual Council formally appoints Members of the Council to the office of Mayor and Deputy Mayor for the forthcoming Municipal year. The Member appointed to the position of Deputy Mayor is normally appointed to the office of Mayor in the following year.

At previous meetings of the Council Forum it has been agreed that the rotation of the nomination to the Office of Mayor between the political groups be based on proportionality of the Council, and an agreed rotation would be set for the next five years.

The existing rotation agreement commenced in May 2018 and ends in 2022/23 is as follows.

2018/19 Labour
2019/20 Labour
2020/21 Labour
2021/22 Conservative
2022/23 Labour

The Annual Council in May 2022 will be asked to confirm the Labour nomination for Mayor and will also need to seek nomination for the Deputy Mayor, who in line with tradition will normally be appointed to the office of Mayor in the following year. Accordingly, the Council is asked to agree its next 5 year rotation, to facilitate next years nominations

The proportionality of the Council following the local elections is as follows:

Labour	34 Seats	(67%)
Conservative	14 Seats	(27%)
Liberal Democrat	1 Seat	(2%)
Independent	2 Seats	(4%)

It is suggested based on the above proportionality the rotation of Mayoral nomination for the next five years would be as follows:

2023/24	Labour
2024/25	Labour
2025/26	Conservative
2026/27	Labour
2027/28	Labour

It is suggested that the Leader present a report on the appointment of the Mayor as in previous years to the Annual Council each year, and in the event that the proportionality of the Council changes going forward in a way that would affect the nomination of Mayor for a particular year, a report on this matter would be submitted for Council's consideration.

In accordance with the above and as previously agreed at Council Forum in May 2021, it would be for the Labour Group to nominate the Mayor for 2022/23, who in line with usual practice would be the serving Deputy Mayor, which in this case is Councillor Suleman Khonat.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Office of Mayor is funded from the Council's annual budget..

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Office of Mayor is provided for in the Council's Constitution.

6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

None

7. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

None

8. CONSULTATIONS

None

Contact Officer: David Fairclough, Director HR Governance & Engagement
(01254 585642)

Date: 17th June 2021

Background Papers: None



REPORT OF:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE
TO:	COUNCIL FORUM
ON:	22nd JULY 2021

SUBJECT: APPOINTMENT OF MONITORING OFFICER, APPOINTMENT OF SECTION 151 OFFICER & UPDATING OF THE CONSTITUTION

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To advise Council that the current Monitoring Officer will leave his post on 12th September 2021 and to ask Council to agree the arrangements for the Monitoring Officer function following this date.

To update the Council on the recruitment of the Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and formally agree the appointment as the Council's s151 Chief Financial Officer from 23rd August 2021.

To also request the Council approve updates of the Constitution as set out in this report.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council is asked:

1. To note the current Monitoring Officer, David Fairclough will leave his post on 12th September 2021
2. To approve that Asad Laher, Head of Legal & Governance / Council Solicitor be appointed Monitoring Officer with effect from 13th September 2021
3. To note the appointment of Dean Langton as Director of Finance and to approve that he be appointed the Council's Section 151 Chief Financial Officer with effect from 23rd August 2021.
4. To approve the updates to the Scheme of Delegation in the Council Constitution as set out in this report.

3. INFORMATION

3.1 Appointment of Monitoring Officer

Currently David Fairclough, Director HR, Governance and Engagement, is the Council's Monitoring Officer, being appointed by the Council to this role in March 2011.

In September 2021, David will retire from his post with the Council and therefore the Council must appoint a new Monitoring Officer.

Given the wider impact of Covid and the current range of associated interim management and service delivery activities, arrangements are yet to be concluded for the permanent recruitment for the post of Director HR, Governance & Engagement. In due course however a report will be presented to the Chief Officer Employment Committee in respect of this vacancy.

In the meantime, the Chief Executive, having consulted with members of the Chief Officer Employment Committee, has made arrangements to cover the duties and responsibilities of this role via a temporary realignment of responsibilities primarily through two existing senior members of the extended leadership team, with associated support.

Firstly via a role of Strategic Head of Service, HR & Engagement (Covid Coordination) & secondly via a role of Strategic Head of Service, Legal & Governance.

The latter post contains the duties and responsibilities associated with the Monitoring Officer role, given Section 5 of the Local Government & Housing Act 1989 requires Councils to appoint a Monitoring Officer to undertake the statutory responsibilities and the duties contained in the Constitution.

It is proposed therefore that Asad Laher who has been appointed on an interim basis as Strategic Head of Service, Legal & Governance, and who currently acts as the Council Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer, now be appointed by Council to be the Monitoring Officer pending a future report regarding the longer term position.

These changes outlined will require some interim changes to the Scheme of Delegation and other related role responsibilities set out in the Constitution. Details of these proposed changes are set out below.

3.2 Appointment of Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer)

As reported to Finance Council on 1st March 2021 the previous postholder had given notice of resignation from the above post and subsequently left the Council in April 2021.

The Finance Council approved that Denise Park, be appointed interim Section 151 Officer pending an appointment to the post of Director of Finance by the Chief Officer Employment Committee.

Following an external open recruitment process the Chief Officer Employment Committee in May unanimously agreed that Dean Langton be appointed to the post of Director of Finance and that he be recommended to the Council for appointment to the s151 Chief Financial Officer role. Dean will take up the post with effect from 23rd August 2021.

3.3 Constitution Updates

The Constitution was last updated in March 2021.

The Constitution is a key document setting out the governance framework of the Council. From time to time the constitution needs to be updated to reflect changes in legislation, resolutions passed by Council, portfolio changes made by the Leader, and changes made to the Council management structure and delegations.

The Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officers regularly review the Constitution to ensure continued compliance with legislation, to clarify where necessary, to deal with any potential errors or inaccuracies and to generally keep the Constitution up to date.

The Officer Scheme of Delegation forms part of the Constitution and as changes are made to roles and responsibilities, this regularly requires updating.

In this context it is proposed to update the Officer Scheme of Delegation as follows: (Part 3 section 16)

3.3.1. Public Protection responsibilities

It is considered appropriate to further clarify roles and responsibilities between the delegated powers of the Director of Place and Strategic Director of Adults & Health to assist understanding and transparency. It is proposed the following additional delegation is inserted in the specific delegations for the Director of Place:

“To exercise the powers and duties of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 insofar as they facilitate, or are conducive or incidental to the discharge of any of the Council’s public protection functions including environmental health, trading standards, licensing, housing standards and environmental protection matters.”

With a consequential amendment to paragraph 13 of the powers for the Strategic Director of Adults & Health to read

“13. To exercise all relevant powers under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (except where such powers are exercised by the Director of Place).”

3.3.2. Director HR, Governance & Engagement – Interim Arrangements

As set out above this post becomes vacant in September 2021 and the Chief Executive, has made arrangements to cover the duties and responsibilities of this role via a temporary realignment of responsibilities.

It is proposed, subject to the Council Forum agreement on the role of Monitoring Officer set out above, that the Officer Scheme of Delegation therefore be temporarily amended to confirm the `General Delegations to all Chief Officers` (Section 16, A.– C.) can be exercised by the two identified post holders and also that the Strategic Head of Service, HR & Engagement (Covid Coordination) be specifically delegated duties, 2, 8, 10, 15, &

16 and the Strategic Head of Service, Legal & Governance be specifically delegated duties 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15. – Both subject to the accountability and concurrence of the Chief Executive or Strategic Director Resources as appropriate.

3.3.3. Deputy Directors

Currently the Officer Scheme of Delegation does not specifically record the deputy function which provides resilience and assurance to the organisation in the absence of Strategic Directors. It is proposed to address this omission by the inclusion of the following

“To the Deputy Director Adult Social Care

All Powers shall be exercised in compliance with the law and the Council’s Constitution, policies, rules and controls issued by the Council from time to time including specifically the Financial Procedure Rules and the Contract and Procurement Procedure Rules.

The Deputy Director be authorised to exercise all the Authority’s powers, functions and responsibilities in relation to services delivered by the Adult & Health Department in the absence of the Strategic Director Adults & Health

The Deputy Director to also have directly delegated from the Strategic Director Adults & Health such powers and duties as may be set out as described annually under paragraph 1 of this Scheme of Delegation”

“To the Deputy Director Children’s Social Care

All Powers shall be exercised in compliance with the law and the Council’s Constitution, policies, rules and controls issued by the Council from time to time including specifically the Financial Procedure Rules and the Contract and Procurement Procedure Rules.

The Deputy Director be authorised to exercise all the Authority’s powers, functions and responsibilities in relation to services delivered by the Children’s Services & Education Department in the absence of the Strategic Director Children & Education

The Deputy Director to also have directly delegated from the Strategic Director Children & Education such powers and duties as may be set out as described annually under paragraph 1 of this Scheme of Delegation”

“To the Deputy Director Education Services

All Powers shall be exercised in compliance with the law and the Council’s Constitution, policies, rules and controls issued by the Council from time to time including specifically the Financial Procedure Rules and the Contract and Procurement Procedure Rules.

The Deputy Director be authorised to exercise all the Authorities powers, functions and responsibilities in relation to services delivered by the Children’s Services & Education Department in the absence of the Strategic Director Children & Education

The Deputy Director to also have directly delegated from the Strategic Director Children & Education such powers and duties as may be set out as described annually under paragraph 1 of this Scheme of Delegation”

Contact Officer: Denise Park, Chief Executive
David Fairclough, Director HR, Governance & Engagement

Date: 14 July 2021

Background Papers: Appointment of Monitoring Officer
Appointment of Section 151 Officer
Constitution Updates



REPORT OF:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE
TO:	COUNCIL FORUM
ON:	22nd JULY 2021

SUBJECT:

INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL & MEMBER ALLOWANCES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

For Council Forum to consider recommendations relating to the Independent Remuneration Panel for 2022 onwards.

2. BACKGROUND

Part 6 of the Council Constitution details the Members Allowances Scheme.

Under paragraph 3 of the Scheme it is a requirement that the Scheme be reviewed at least every 4 years. The Council last reviewed the Scheme in 2017/18 for introduction in May 2018.

Accordingly Council is now asked to agree that, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 (as amended), recruitment to a refreshed Independent Remuneration Panel is undertaken as soon as possible, (with an invite to existing members to reapply should they wish to continue). Regulation 20 of the above provides that the panel must be independent, consisting of at least three members none of whom:

“(a) is also a member of an authority in respect of which it makes recommendations or is a member of a committee or sub-committee of such an authority; or

(b) is disqualified from being or becoming a member of an authority.”

Once established/refreshed, the Remuneration panel will make recommendations back to Council for consideration in respect of the Members Allowance Scheme.

As noted above the current Scheme has been in place since May 2018. Under paragraph 5.2, of the Approved Scheme the Council is asked to note that allowances have since

been increased in line with the NJC pay awards in 2019/20 and more recently for 2020/21. No pay award has yet been agreed for NJC staff for 2021/22.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Council agrees to commence the process to recruit and appoint members to a refreshed Independent Remuneration Panel to develop and make recommendations for the Members Allowances Scheme from 2022 onwards in accordance with the Regulations. That the Council also notes that payments are currently continuing in accordance with the Scheme as approved from 2018 including increases reflecting the NJC Pay Awards since.

Contact Officer: Denise Park, Chief Executive
David Fairclough, Director HR Legal & Governance

Date: 2nd July 2021

Background Papers: Independent Remuneration Panel



TO: Audit & Governance Committee

FROM: Director HR, Governance & Engagement
Strategic Director, Resources

DATE: 29 June 2021

PORTFOLIOS AFFECTED: All

WARDS AFFECTED: All

TITLE OF BRIEFING PAPER Audit & Governance Committee Annual Report

1. PURPOSE

The draft Audit & Governance Committee Annual Report 2020/21 is attached for consideration and approval (Appendix A). This summarises the work undertaken and reports considered by the Committee during the year to demonstrate that it has fulfilled its agreed terms of reference.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to:

- Consider and approve the Committee’s Annual Report; and
- Refer the report to Full Council for endorsement.

3. BACKGROUND

The CIPFA ‘Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police’ 2018 edition incorporates CIPFA’s Position Statement on Audit Committees in Local Authorities and the Police as well as setting out the purpose and core functions of an audit committee. This notes that although no single model of committee is prescribed, all should report regularly on their work and at least annually report an assessment of their performance.

4. RATIONALE

The Audit & Governance Committee is a key component of the maintenance of an adequate and effective governance framework. Through its annual report the Committee can demonstrate its effectiveness in fulfilling its role to provide independent assurance regarding the adequacy of risk management, the overall governance and associated control environment, and also scrutiny of the Council’s financial and non financial performance to the extent that it affects its exposure to risk and weakens the control environment.

5. KEY ISSUES

Having an effective Committee brings many benefits to the Council, such as:

- increasing public confidence in the objectivity and fairness of financial and other reporting;
- providing additional assurance through a process of independent and objective scrutiny;
- raising awareness of the need for internal control and the implementation of audit recommendations; and,
- reinforcing the importance and independence of internal audit.

The Committee's activities during 2020/21 were designed to make a positive contribution to the continual improvement of control, governance and risk management arrangements across the Council, as well as performing the roles set out for the Committee in the Council's Constitution.

The Committee has had the opportunity to examine and challenge the arrangements for effective governance. The Annual Report indicates the breadth of the Committee's work in ensuring that every aspect of the Council's work should be compliant with standards and transparent to its stakeholders. The reports received by the Committee during 2020/21 indicate that there has been thorough coverage of the Committee's Terms of Reference. In this way, the Annual Report demonstrates the value of the Committee to the Council and public, ensuring that governance is on a sound footing.

Good practice guidance exists for the effective operation of audit committees across the public sector, including the most recent publication by CIPFA noted above. That guidance includes a Self-Assessment of Good Practice. This was completed on behalf of the Committee during the year and was considered at its meeting on 14 January 2020. Appendix 2 of the attached report sets out the result from the self-assessment. The guidance also included a tool for audit committees to use to evaluate their effectiveness. The results of this assessment are set out in Appendix 3 to the attached report for consideration.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct policy implications arising from this report.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct legal implications from this report.

9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The resource implications are within the report.

10. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

The decisions to be taken do not change policy and do not require any further consideration in respect of equality or health issues.

11. CONSULTATIONS

Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee.

Contact Officer: Colin Ferguson, Head of Audit & Assurance - Ext 5326
Date: 16 June 2021
Background Papers: CIPFA Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police (2018 Edition).

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council



Draft Audit & Governance Committee Annual Report 2020/21

1. Background to the Governance Framework

1.1. What drives governance policy?

- 1.1.1. The Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is also responsible for ensuring that there are sound systems of control and governance which facilitate the effective exercise of the Council's functions and which include adequate arrangements for the management of risk.
- 1.1.2. Effective corporate governance is a fundamental feature of any successful public sector organisation. Corporate governance initially became a major issue after several high profile failures in the private sector. As a result, there were several reviews directed at improving governance in that sector.
- 1.1.3. The trend for strengthening governance arrangements spread to the public sector and resulted in the joint Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)/Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) document *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government – a Framework*, in 2007. The Framework, published in 2007, was intended to be used as best practice for developing and maintaining a locally adopted code of governance. It was intended to assist authorities in reviewing the effectiveness of their own governance arrangements by reference to best practice and using self-assessment.
- 1.1.4. In 2016 CIPFA/SOLACE published a revised Framework to ensure that local government continues to develop and shape its own approach to governance, taking account of the environment in which it now operates. The new Framework applied to annual governance statements prepared for the financial year 2016/17 onwards. It is based on the *International Framework: Good Governance in the Public Sector* published by CIFA and the International Federation of Accountants in 2014 and contains seven core principles.
- 1.1.5. The International framework defines governance as follows:
“Governance comprises the arrangements put in place to ensure the intended outcomes for stakeholders are defined and achieved.”
- 1.1.6. It also states that:
“To deliver good governance in the public sector both governing bodies and individuals working for public sector entities must try to achieve their entities objectives while acting in the public interest at all times. Acting in the public interest implies primary consideration of the benefits for society, which should result in positive outcomes for service users and stakeholders.”
- 1.1.7. Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council operates through a governance framework that brings together an underlying set of legislative requirements, governance principles and corporate policies and management processes.
- 1.1.8. The Council recognises the seven core principles of good governance identified by CIPFA/SOLACE to ensure that the intended outcomes for stakeholders are defined and achieved, while acting in the public interest at all times. These are:
 - A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law;

- B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement;
 - C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits;
 - D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes;
 - E. Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it;
 - F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management; and
 - G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability.
- 1.1.9. The Council's local Code of Corporate Governance was revised during 2016 to ensure that it complied with the latest requirements. It was updated again during 2018/19 as part of the annual review of the Constitution, to provide improved clarity and explanation and was approved by full Council in May 2018.

2. **Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council Audit & Governance Committee**

2.1. **Why do we need an Audit Committee?**

- 2.1.1. Whilst there is currently no statutory requirement to have an audit committee they are widely recognised as a core component of an effective governance framework and therefore reflect good practise. Regardless of a specific legislative or regulatory framework, Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires local authorities to make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and appoint a Chief Financial Officer to have responsibility for those affairs. To be truly effective, the Chief Financial Officer requires an effective audit committee to provide support and challenge, as well as an adequate and effective internal audit. Both these elements are now enshrined in the 'Public Sector Internal Audit Standards' and the supporting 'Local Government Application Note' published by CIPFA. The Council's Audit & Governance Committee has a key role in overseeing and assessing the internal control, risk management and corporate governance arrangements in place and advising on the adequacy and effectiveness of these arrangements. This role is formalised in the Committee's terms of reference.
- 2.1.2. The Council's Audit & Governance Committee is properly constituted and is given sufficient authority and resources by the Council. The Committee has the right to obtain all the information it considers necessary and to consult directly with senior managers. In line with best practice from both the public and private sectors, the Audit & Governance Committee can report its observations and concerns directly to the Executive Board.
- 2.1.3. Good corporate governance requires independent and effective assurance about the adequacy of financial management and of management arrangements for achieving the organisation's objectives. These responsibilities require an independent and challenging approach. Through these mechanisms, Committee Members are able to use their skills and experiences to influence the Council's governance, internal control processes and risk management arrangements.

- 2.1.4. An effective Committee can bring many benefits to the Council, including:
- increasing public confidence in the objectivity and fairness of financial and other reporting;
 - providing additional assurance through a process of independent and objective scrutiny;
 - raising awareness of the need for internal control and the implementation of audit recommendations; and,
 - reinforcing the importance and independence of internal audit.

2.2. What does an audit committee do?

- 2.2.1. Audit committees are a key component of corporate governance. They increase public confidence in the objectivity and fairness of financial and other reporting. They also provide a high-level focus on assurance and the organisation's arrangements for governance, managing risk and maintaining an effective control environment.
- 2.2.2. Good practice is contained within CIPFA's document 'Audit Committees – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and the Police' (2018 Edition). The latest edition of the document updates the core functions of an audit committee in relation to governance, risk management, internal control and audit. The introduction of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, along with annual governance statements and associated guidance has also been considered in relation to their impact on an audit committee.
- 2.2.3. During 2020/21 the Audit & Governance Committee consisted of six cross party elected Members. The Committee's purpose, as proscribed in its terms of reference, are to:
- provide independent assurance of the adequacy of the risk management framework, overall governance and the associated control environment and the extent to which these meet the objectives of the Local Code of Corporate Governance;
 - provide independent review of the Council's governance, risk management and control frameworks;
 - oversee the financial reporting and annual governance processes; and
 - oversee internal and external audit, helping to ensure efficient and effective assurance arrangements are in place.
- 2.2.4. The Audit & Governance Committee provides an independent and high-level focus on the audit, assurance and reporting arrangements that underpin good governance and financial standards. It also provides assurance, on behalf of the Council, about the extent to which the objectives of the Local Code of Corporate Governance, as set out in its Constitution, are being met. This purpose is reflected in the Committee's Terms of Reference which are included at Appendix 1 of this report.
- 2.2.5. The CIPFA guidance includes a greater focus on the factors that support improvement. These include the knowledge and skills that Audit Committee members require and a focus on where the Audit Committee adds value. The publication provides practical support to the Committee in evaluating the existing Committee arrangements and any planned improvements.
- 2.2.6. The guidance includes a self-assessment checklist of good practice to assist both Members and Officers who are involved in the operation of the Committee. The checklist was reviewed and updated by Audit & Assurance on behalf of the Committee during 2020/21. It was presented for

consideration at the Committee's meeting on 30 March 2021, along with an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Committee completed by Audit & Assurance on behalf of the Committee. It also included a summary of the results of individual members own self-assessments of the Committee's effectiveness. The results of the assessments against the CIPFA best practise and evaluation of effectiveness are included at Appendix 2 and 3 of this report for reference. The results show that there is a belief by the members that the Committee is operating effectively, with average scores of satisfactory/partly agree or better for most questions.

- 2.2.7. The Audit & Governance Committee met four times during the 2020/21 financial year. Timings of the meetings throughout the year are designed to coincide with the governance timetable. The July meeting received various annual assurance reports including the Head of Audit Annual Audit Opinion and the Treasury Management Annual Report. The Council's 2019/20 Annual Governance Statement was also received and approved. The January meeting approved the 2019/20 Statement of Accounts, and received the 2019/20 External Auditor's Findings Report. The External Auditor's Annual Audit Letter for the year ended 31 March 2020 was considered at the March 2021 meeting along with the results of the Committee's self-assessment and the 2020/21 Significant Partnerships Register.
- 2.2.8. The Committee's terms of reference and outline work programme (see Appendices 1 and 4), and associated reports it receives, are designed to enable its Members to make a positive contribution to the continual improvement of control and governance processes and arrangements across the Council, as well as performing the roles as identified by the Constitution. Member attendance details are set out in Appendix 4
- 2.2.9. As well as the assurance provided to the Committee from the key reports received from the Council's External Auditor, the Committee also places reliance on the work carried out by Audit & Assurance in delivering the annual internal audit plan. Assurance is gained throughout the year from considering the quarterly progress reports received. These provide the Committee with an overview of the activity carried out by internal audit during the period, including counter fraud activity, and an overview of all audit reports finalised. Emphasis has been on limited or no assurance reports. Where these opinions are in respect of key or fundamental systems senior officers have been invited to update the members on progress of implementing recommendations from these reports to provide further assurance to the Committee regarding the implementation of agreed actions.
- 2.2.10. The Committee also receives a full year overview of internal audit work when the Internal Audit Annual Opinion Report is presented, alongside the Annual Counter Fraud Report. The former report provides the Head of Audit opinion on the Council's overall position in relation to the adequacy and effectiveness of risk, governance and internal control systems, based on the work completed by the internal audit team, as required by the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.
- 2.2.11. The details of the Committee's work programme for 2020/21 and associated reports received, (see Appendix 4), demonstrate how the Committee has fulfilled its terms of reference during the year and its commitment to monitoring and helping improve the Council's risk, control and governance environments' in the year ahead.

2.2.12. In addition to these meetings, an induction and refresher session was held for the Committee members to explain the purpose of the Committee and their role and responsibilities. The members were also provided with links to a CIPFA webinar on internal audit for audit committee members, the CIPFA Counter Fraud Workbook for Councillors and counter fraud training and awareness information. There has also been mandatory finance training for all members to provide them with an overview of the Local Authority financing regime prior to the Finance Council meeting in March 2021 where the 2020/21 budget was presented for approval. The Committee also had a briefing session on the Statement of Accounts prior to their approval. This highlighted key facts and figures for consideration.

2.3. How do officers support the Committee?

2.3.1. The Audit & Governance Committee is supported by:

- The Chief Executive, as Head of the Paid Service, with overall responsibility for the Council's management and executive arrangements;
- The Director of HR, Legal & Engagement, as the Monitoring Officer, who is required by law to ensure that the Council acts within its legal powers at all times; and,
- The Director of Finance, as Section 151 Officer, who is responsible under the law for ensuring the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs.

2.3.2. The Director of HR, Legal & Engagement leads on constitutional, legal, and human resource issues. The Director of Finance takes the lead on financial, audit, risk management and internal control matters. The Head of Audit & Assurance also has a key role to play in supporting the Committee because of the importance of the Internal Audit Service to governance. These Officers are responsible for making the Committee aware of any relevant changes in regulations, guidance, and codes of practice.

2.3.3. The Committee is also supported by External Audit colleagues, who attend each meeting to update members on the progress and results of their work, as well as providing regular sector updates for consideration. These highlight key findings and messages from national reports and studies and include questions for consideration by the Committee.

2.3.4. During the year the Committee continued its cycle of corporate risk reviews. Corporate risk owners and/or key contacts for the risk areas have provided briefings to the Committee on a selection of risk register entries. This has included details regarding the background to the risk identified, the risk assessment process and control arrangements in place to manage or mitigate the relevant risk should it occur. This review and challenge process has improved the Committee's oversight and understanding of the likelihood and potential impact of the corporate risks identified by the Council and on the achievement of related corporate priorities.

2.4. Effectiveness of the Audit & Governance Committee

2.4.1. The Committee considers that it has been effective in fulfilling its terms of reference during 2020/21. The details provided in this report and the reports presented and considered by its members during 2020/21 demonstrate that

adequate consideration has been given to all the core areas identified to enable the Committee to fulfil its role and responsibilities.

- 2.4.2. The Committee's terms of reference set out a range of activities that provide appropriate assurance to the Council in terms of how it manages risk, and ensures adequate and effective control and governance arrangements exist and operate effectively to secure the efficiency and effective use of its resources. Training opportunities have been made available to members during the year to update their skills and knowledge to ensure that they are able to fulfil their role as members of the Committee.
- 2.4.3. The Committee has been active during the year in carrying out its duties in monitoring internal and external reports to ensure that it is satisfied with the effectiveness of controls and the governance and risk management arrangements in place, in accordance with its role and functions set out in its terms of reference in Appendix 1.
- 2.4.4. Based on the reports and information presented to the Audit & Governance Committee for consideration during the 2020/21 it is the members view that the Council has sound financial controls, risk management and governance arrangements in place.
- 2.4.5. The Committee also has the opportunity to invite those senior officers and managers to account for services or functions where they consider there have been significant financial, internal control or governance weaknesses identified. No significant areas of concern were identified during 2020/21 where this was required. The members continue to challenge any impairment in stewardship and control of public funds and assets, seeking assurance that prompt and proportionate management actions have been taken. This provides the Council with assurance that effective internal control arrangements were in place during the year and that appropriate action has been taken to address any concerns raised as a result of any of the inspection and assurance processes in place. This is evidenced by the details provided in Appendix 4 through the various reports received and considered by the Committee at its meetings during the year to support its work programme and how each of these enable the Committee to fulfil its terms of reference.
- 2.4.6. The External Auditor's 2020 Audit Findings Report for Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council included an opinion on value for money. The External Auditor was required to carry out sufficient work to be satisfied on whether the Council had made proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources during the year ended March 2020 and to provide a conclusion on this. In doing this work the main considerations the Auditor focussed on were:
- Financial sustainability; and
 - Implementation of regulator recommendations.
- 2.4.7. Based on the work they performed to address the significant risks, External Audit were satisfied that the Council had proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2020. They did not identify any significant difficulties in undertaking their work on Council arrangements to draw to the Committee's attention. There were no matters where no other evidence was available or matters of such significance to their conclusion or that they required written representation from management.

AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCEStatement of Purpose:

Our Audit and Governance Committee is a key component of Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council's corporate governance. It provides an independent and high-level focus on the audit, assurance and reporting arrangements that underpin good governance and financial standards.

The purpose of the Audit and Governance Committee is to:

- provide independent assurance to the Council of the adequacy of the risk management framework and the internal control environment and the extent to which these meet the objectives of the Local Code of Corporate Governance;
- provide independent review of the Council's governance, risk management and control frameworks;
- oversee the financial reporting and annual governance processes; and
- oversee internal and external audit, helping to ensure efficient and effective assurance arrangements are in place.

Governance, Risk and Control:

The Audit and Governance Committee will:

1. Review the Council's corporate governance arrangements against the good governance framework including the ethical framework and consider the local code of governance.
2. Review the Annual Governance Statement prior to approval and consider whether it properly reflects the risk environment and supporting assurances, taking into account internal audit's opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and controls.
3. Consider the Council's arrangements to secure value for money and review assurances and assessments on the effectiveness of these arrangements;
4. Consider the framework of assurance (including the Management Accountabilities Framework) and ensure that it adequately addresses the risks and priorities of the Council;
5. Monitor the effective development and operation of risk management in the Council;
6. Monitor progress in addressing risk-related issues reported to the Committee;
7. Consider reports on the effectiveness of internal controls and monitor the implementation of agreed actions;
8. Review the assessment of fraud risks and potential harm to the Council from fraud and corruption;
9. Monitor the Counter Fraud strategy, actions and resources; and
10. To review the Governance and Assurance arrangements for significant partnership or collaborations.

Internal Audit

The Audit and Governance Committee will:

1. Approve the internal audit charter.
2. Approve the risk-based internal audit plan, including internal audit's resource requirements, the approach to using other sources of assurance and any work required to place reliance upon those other sources.
3. Approve significant interim changes to the risk-based internal audit plan and resource requirements.
4. Make appropriate enquiries of both management and the Head of Audit & Assurance to determine if there are any inappropriate scope or resource limitations.

5. Consider reports from the Head of Audit & Assurance on internal audit's performance during the year. These will include:
 - a) Updates on the work of internal audit including key findings, issues of concern and action in hand as a result of internal audit work.
 - b) Regular reports on the results of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme.
 - c) Reports on instances where the internal audit function does not conform to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and Local Government Application Note, considering whether the non-conformance is significant enough that it must be included in the Annual Governance Statement.
6. Consider the Head of Audit & Assurance's annual report, including:
 - a) The statement of the level of conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and Local Government Application Note and the results of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme that supports the statement – these will indicate the reliability of the conclusions of internal audit.
 - b) The opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the council's framework of governance, risk management and control together with the summary of the work supporting the opinion and the implications of any significant matters identified – these will assist the Committee in reviewing the Annual Governance Statement.
 - c) An annual risk management report.
7. Consider summaries of specific internal audit reports as requested.
8. Receive reports outlining the action taken where the Head of Audit & Assurance has concluded that management has accepted a level of risk that may be unacceptable to the authority or there are concerns about progress with the implementation of agreed actions.
9. Contribute to the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme and in particular, to the external quality assessment of internal audit that takes place at least once every five years.
10. Consider a report on the effectiveness of internal audit to support the Annual Governance Statement, where required to do so by the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
11. To provide free and unfettered access to the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee Chair for the Head of Audit and Assurance, including the opportunity for a private meeting with the Committee.

External Audit

The Audit and Governance Committee will:

1. Support the independence of external audit through consideration of the external auditor's annual assessment of its independence and review of any issues raised by Public Sector Audit Appointments;
2. Consider the external auditor's annual letter, relevant reports, and the report to those charged with governance prior to publication of the annual accounts;
3. Consider specific reports as agreed with the external auditor;
4. Comment on the scope and depth of external audit work and to ensure it is effective and gives value for money;
5. Commission work from internal and external audit; and
6. Advise and recommend on the effectiveness of relationships between external and internal audit and other inspection agencies or relevant bodies.

Financial Reporting

The Audit and Governance Committee will:

1. Review the annual statement of accounts. Specifically, to consider whether appropriate accounting policies have been followed and whether there are concerns arising from the financial statements or from the audit that need to be brought to the attention of the council; and

2. Consider the external auditor's report to those charged with governance on issues arising from the audit of the accounts.

Treasury Management

The Audit and Governance Committee will:

1. Monitor the Council's treasury management arrangements in accordance with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice;
2. Ensure effective scrutiny of the treasury management strategy and policies;
3. Review the treasury management risk profile and adequacy of risk management processes; and
4. Consider reports on treasury management activity during the year.

Accountability Arrangements

The Audit and Governance Committee will:

1. Report to those charged with governance on the Committee's findings, conclusions and recommendations concerning the adequacy and effectiveness of their governance, risk management and internal control frameworks; financial reporting arrangements, and internal and external audit functions.
2. Report to full council on an annual basis outlining the Committee's performance in relation to the terms of reference and the effectiveness of the Committee in meeting its purpose.
3. Publish an annual report on the work of the Committee.

Authority

The Committee is authorised by the Council to investigate any activity within its terms of reference. It is authorised to seek any information it requires from any employee, including those of partner organisations, and all employees are directed to co-operate with any request made by the Committee.

Frequency of Meetings

The Committee will normally meet five times each year to fulfil its requirements.

Outline Programme

In order to meet its principal responsibilities during the year the Committee will consider the following reports/activities:

PROGRAMME ACTIVITY:	TERMS OF REFERENCE NUMBER
Governance, Risk and Control	
Annual Statement (AGS)	1,2,3,4
AGS Progress Report	1,2
Risk Management Annual Report	4,5,6
Internal Audit Opinion Report	2,5,7
External Audit VFM Conclusion	3
MAF Update	4
Risk Management Update	5,6
Corporate Health, Safety & Wellbeing Annual Report	4,5,6
IA Progress & Outcomes Report	7,8,9
Reports from Other Committees or agencies	3,4,5,6,7

Significant Partnerships Report	10
Internal Audit	
Annual Plan	1,2,4
IA Progress & Outcomes Report	3,4,5,7,8
Risk Management Annual Report	8
Annual Opinion Report	6,9,10,11,12
External Audit	
Annual Audit Letter	1,4,5
Annual Plan	2,5
Progress Report	2,3
Findings Report	2,5
Value For Money Conclusion	3,5
Fees Letter	4,5
Financial Reporting	
Statement of Accounts	1
External Audit Findings Report	2
Treasury Management	
Strategy Report	1,2
Progress Report	1,3,4
Annual Outturn Report	1,3,4
Accountability Arrangements	
Committee Annual Report	1,2,3
Committee Self-assessment	2,3

The programme itself will develop over time as new statutory responsibilities are introduced and the timetable may vary, for example, as the Council is required to close its accounts earlier each year.

Membership

The Committee will consist of six members appointed by Full Council. In addition, the Executive Member for Resources will also attend each Committee meeting.

The Leader of the Council and all Executive Members are precluded from being voting members of the Committee.

A quorum shall be three Members.

New Committee members will be required to undertake appropriate induction training to enable them to adequately perform their duties as and when necessary.

Attendance

Committee members are expected to make every effort to attend all meetings, where this is not possible a substitute should be nominated.

To achieve these objectives the Committee will depend principally on the attendance of the Chief Executive, Director of Finance and Customer Services, the Director of HR, Legal & Corporate Services and the Head of Audit & Assurance or their nominated

representatives. The Council's external auditors, external advisors and Directors may be requested to attend as and when appropriate.

Reporting

The Annual Audit and Governance Committee Report will be formally reported to Full Council.

Further reports will be made in those cases where the Committee considers matters must be formally brought to the attention of Full Council.

CIPFA PRACTICAL GUIDANCE ON AUDIT COMMITTEES – GOOD PRACTICE SELF-ASSESSMENT

REF	GOOD PRACTICE QUESTIONS	YES	PARTIAL	NO	ACTION REQUIRED
<i>Audit Committee purpose and governance</i>					
1	Does the Authority have a dedicated audit committee?	√			
2	Does the audit committee report directly to full council?	√			
3	Do the terms of reference clearly set out the purpose of the committee in accordance with CIPFA's Position Statement?	√			
4	Is the role and purpose of the audit committee understood and accepted across the authority?	√			
5	Does the audit committee provide support to the authority in meeting the requirements of good governance?	√			
6	Are the arrangements to hold the committee to account for its performance operating satisfactorily?	√			
<i>Functions of the committee</i>					
7	<p>Do the committee's terms of reference explicitly address all the core areas identified in CIPFA's Position Statement?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ good governance. ▪ assurance framework. including partnerships and collaboration arrangements, ▪ internal audit. ▪ external audit. ▪ financial reporting. ▪ risk management. ▪ value for money or best value. ▪ counter-fraud and corruption. ▪ supporting the ethical framework 	√			
8	Is an annual evaluation undertaken to assess whether the committee is fulfilling its terms of reference and that adequate consideration has been given to all core areas?	√			

REF	GOOD PRACTICE QUESTIONS	YES	PARTIAL	NO	ACTION REQUIRED
9	Has the audit committee considered the wider areas identified in CIPFA's Position Statement and whether it would be appropriate for the committee to undertake them?	√			
10	Where coverage of core areas has been found to be limited, are plans in place to address this?	√			
11	Has the committee maintained its non-advisory role by not taking on any decision-making powers that are not in line with its core purpose?	√			
Membership and support					
12	Has an effective audit committee structure and composition of the committee been selected? This should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ separation from the executive. ▪ an appropriate mix of knowledge and skills among the membership. ▪ a size of committee that is not unwieldy. ▪ consideration has been given to the inclusion of at least one independent member (where it is not already a mandatory requirement). 	√			
13	Have independent members appointed to the committee been recruited in an open and transparent way and approved by the Full council or as appropriate for the organisation?				Not applicable.
14	Does the chair of the committee have appropriate knowledge and skills?	√			
15	Are arrangements in place to support the committee with briefings and training?	√			
16	Has the membership of the committee been assessed against the core knowledge and skills framework and found to be satisfactory?	√			

REF	GOOD PRACTICE QUESTIONS	YES	PARTIAL	NO	ACTION REQUIRED
17	Does the committee have good working relations with key people and organisations, including external audit, internal audit and the chief financial officer?	√			
18	Is adequate secretariat and administrative support to the committee provided?	√			
Effectiveness of the committee					
19	Has the committee obtained feedback on its performance from those interacting with the committee or relying on its work?			√	No formal feedback but Committee members may receive feedback from member colleagues at Group meetings or on other occasions. The Committee's Annual Report and minutes from meetings are presented to Full Council.
20	Are meetings effective with a good level of discussion and engagement from all the members?	√			
21	Does the committee engage with a wide range of leaders and managers, including discussion of audit findings, risks and action plans with the responsible officers?	√			
22	Does the committee make recommendations for the improvement of governance, risk and control and are these acted on?	√			
23	Has the committee evaluated whether and how it is adding value to the organisation?	√			
24	Does the committee have an action plan to improve any areas of weakness?	√			
25	Does the committee publish an annual report to account for its performance and explain its work?	√			

CIPFA'S AUDIT COMMITTEES PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES (2018 EDITION)**Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Audit Committee****Assessment key**

5	Clear evidence is available from a number of sources that the committee is actively supporting improvements across all aspects of this area. The improvements made are clearly identifiable.
4	Clear evidence from some sources that the committee is actively and effectively supporting improvement across some aspects of this area.
3	The committee has had mixed experience in supporting improvement in this area. There is some evidence that demonstrates their impact but there are also significant gaps.
2	There is some evidence that the committee has supported improvements, but the impact of this support is limited.
1	No evidence can be found that the audit committee has supported improvements in this

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council Audit Committee Effectiveness Assessment 2020/21

Areas where the audit committee can add value by supporting improvement	Examples of how the audit committee can add value and provide evidence of effectiveness	Self-evaluation, examples, areas of strength and weakness	Overall assessment: 5 – 1 See key above
Promoting the principles of good governance and their application to decision making.	<p>Supporting the development of a local code of corporate governance.</p> <p>Providing robust review of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) and the assurances underpinning it.</p> <p>Working with key members to improve their understanding of the AGS and their contribution to it.</p> <p>Supporting reviews/audits of governance arrangements.</p> <p>Participating in self-assessments of governance arrangements.</p> <p>Working with partner audit committees to review governance arrangements in partnerships.</p>	<p>The Committee reviews the draft AGS prior to approving it and monitors progress of actions to address the significant issues identified in the previous year's AGS. It also reviews the Risk Management Annual Report and annual opinions from Internal Audit (IA) and External Audit, which support the AGS.</p> <p>The Committee approves the IA annual audit plan, which classifies audit reviews by assurance area to ensure adequate coverage of risk, governance and control frameworks. It receives a summary of key findings and opinions from individual reviews supporting the overall opinion.</p> <p>The Committee's terms of reference includes the review of the governance and assurance arrangements for significant partnerships or collaborations. The Committee also receives an annual report on the Council's Significant Partnerships Register.</p>	4

Areas where the audit committee can add value by supporting improvement	Examples of how the audit committee can add value and provide evidence of effectiveness	Self-evaluation, examples, areas of strength and weakness	Overall assessment: 5 – 1 See key above
		The Committee Chair is a member of the Primary Assurance Group, which reviews the AGS and related assurance reports.	
Contributing to the development of an effective control environment.	<p>Actively monitoring the implementation of recommendations from auditors.</p> <p>Encouraging ownership of the internal control framework by appropriate managers.</p> <p>Raising significant concerns over controls with appropriate senior managers.</p>	<p>Regular IA Progress Reports are presented to the Committee. These include performance indicators relating to the percentage of recommendations implemented and commentary re outstanding 'must' level recommendations.</p> <p>Senior officers attend the Committee meetings on request to update on the progress of actions from key reports as and provide explanations and updates on progress to address significant audit concerns.</p> <p>The Committee reviews the summary of Management Accountability Framework (MAF) red priority areas of concern.</p> <p>The Committee is also authorised by the Council to investigate any activity within its terms of reference and to seek any information it requires from any employee, including those of partner organisations, and all employees are directed to co-operate with any request made by the Committee.</p>	5
Supporting the establishment of arrangements for the governance of risk and for effective arrangements to manage risks.	<p>Reviewing risk management arrangements and their effectiveness, e.g. risk management benchmarking.</p> <p>Monitoring improvements.</p> <p>Holding risk owners to account for major/strategic risks.</p>	<p>The Committee receives the annual risk management report, which includes key events and achievements for the previous year and key developments for the next 12 months.</p> <p>The corporate risk register summary identifies risk owners at Director/senior officer level and tracks changes to residual risk scores. Regular reports are presented to Committee on the corporate risk register and risk management support activity during the year, including the details of the risk management support provided by Zurich Municipal.</p> <p>The Committee carries out a 'deep dive' review of one or more corporate risks with the relevant risk owner or key contact at its meetings during the year.</p>	5

Areas where the audit committee can add value by supporting improvement	Examples of how the audit committee can add value and provide evidence of effectiveness	Self-evaluation, examples, areas of strength and weakness	Overall assessment: 5 – 1 See key above
<p>Advising on the adequacy of the assurance framework and considering whether assurance is deployed efficiently and effectively.</p>	<p>Specifying its assurance needs, identifying gaps or overlaps in assurance.</p> <p>Seeking to streamline assurance gathering and reporting.</p> <p>Reviewing the effectiveness of assurance providers, e.g. internal audit, risk management, external audit.</p>	<p>There is regular reporting of planned and actual coverage by Internal and External Audit. The Committee challenges opportunities for reliance on IA work by External Auditors and receives Internal and External Audit and Risk Management progress reports. The IA report includes audits in progress and an in-year review of resources and achievement of plan.</p> <p>IA reviewed and provided assurance on risk management arrangements in 2015/16.</p>	<p>4</p>
<p>Supporting the quality of the internal audit activity, particularly by underpinning its organisational independence.</p>	<p>Reviewing the internal audit charter and functional reporting arrangements.</p> <p>Assessing the effectiveness of internal audit arrangements providing constructive challenge and supporting improvements.</p> <p>Actively supporting the quality assurance and improvement.</p>	<p>The Head of Audit & Assurance has right of access to and regular briefings for the Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee.</p> <p>The Committee receives and approves the IA Charter and annual strategic statement, including reporting and monitoring arrangements, supporting the IA annual plan.</p> <p>The External Auditors Audit Findings Report includes commentary on Internal Audit as part of their assessment of financial control arrangements.</p> <p>The Committee reviews the Internal Audit Quality Assurance Improvement Plan. The annual Head of Audit Opinion Report includes an assessment of IA performance and quality assurance. Committee approved Peer review approach for external assessment of IA compliance with Public Service Internal Audit Standards and received the overall opinion and a summary of the findings and themes from the Peer review action plan at its April meeting 2016.</p> <p>Arrangements are in place for the next peer review to be carried out in July 2021.</p>	<p>5</p>

Areas where the audit committee can add value by supporting improvement	Examples of how the audit committee can add value and provide evidence of effectiveness	Self-evaluation, examples, areas of strength and weakness	Overall assessment: 5 – 1 See key above
<p>Aiding the achievement of the authority's goals and objectives through helping to ensure appropriate governance, risk, control and assurance arrangements.</p>	<p>Reviewing how the governance arrangements support the achievement of sustainable outcomes</p> <p>Reviewing major projects and programmes to ensure that governance and assurance arrangements are in place.</p> <p>Reviewing the effectiveness of performance management arrangements.</p>	<p>Work on this area is included in Internal and External Audit plans on a risk assessment basis. IA reviews are classified under one of the three headings in the plan and the annual report. Plans include reviews of key capital and revenue projects. Additional ad hoc work is carried out during the year on request from Directors.</p> <p>Internal audit progress reports include a summary of MAF red priority areas of concern.</p> <p>Performance management is not specifically identified in the Committee Terms of Reference. There are other processes in place within the Council's governance structure, which provide scrutiny and challenge for this area, as part of the Corporate Plan Scorecard monitoring arrangements, to hold Chief Officers and managers to account on a regular basis, such as Management Board and the PAM reporting process as well as Members through PDS, SPT and Executive Board reporting.</p> <p>Internal audit consider performance arrangements as part of any relevant audit and would report on them as part of our progress reporting arrangements.</p> <p>The IA plan also includes specific Key Performance Indicator audits.</p>	4
<p>Supporting the development of robust arrangements for ensuring value for money.</p>	<p>Ensuring that assurance on value for money arrangements is included in the assurances received by the audit committee.</p> <p>Considering how performance in value for money is evaluated as part of the AGS.</p>	<p>Standing Financial Instruction 3, Payment of Creditors, and Corporate Contract & Procurement Procedure Rules are in place as part of the control framework to ensure that value for money is considered in procurement activity. Regular Creditors audits consider on compliance with these requirements. The Committee receives the External Auditor's Audit Findings Report. This includes a section on value for money and an overall conclusion on the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources</p>	4

Areas where the audit committee can add value by supporting improvement	Examples of how the audit committee can add value and provide evidence of effectiveness	Self-evaluation, examples, areas of strength and weakness	Overall assessment: 5 – 1 See key above
<p>Helping the authority to implement the values of good governance, including effective arrangements for countering fraud and corruption risks.</p>	<p>Reviewing arrangements against the standards set out in Code of Practice on managing the Risk of Fraud (CIPFA 2014).</p> <p>Reviewing fraud risks and the effectiveness of the organisation's strategy to address those risks.</p> <p>Assessing the effectiveness of ethical governance arrangements for both staff and members.</p>	<p>A Counter Fraud Policy and Strategy is in place (which was reviewed and updated in 2015/16 in accordance with latest CIPFA guidance) supported by the Counter Fraud Policy Framework which includes a Fraud Response Plan, Whistleblowing Policy, Anti Money Laundering Policy and Members and Employees' Codes of Conduct.</p> <p>The Internal Audit progress reports include oversight of counter fraud activity and results.</p> <p>The Committee consider and approve the annual fraud risk assessment as part of the External Auditor's enquiries of those charged with governance.</p> <p>The Committee receives the Counter Annual Report as part of the suite of annual reports, which is considered prior to approval of the Annual Governance Statement.</p>	5
<p>Promoting effective public reporting to the authority's stakeholders and local community and measures to improve transparency and accountability.</p>	<p>Improving how the authority discharges its responsibilities for public reporting; for example, better targeting at the audience, plain English.</p> <p>Reviewing whether decision making through partnership organisations remains transparent and publicly accessible and encouraging greater transparency.</p> <p>Publishing an annual report from the committee.</p>	<p>Audit & Governance Committee meetings are held in public with minimal Part 2 items. Agendas and reports are published on Council internet website.</p> <p>An Annual Audit Committee report is prepared and considered by full Council.</p> <p>Council Committee agendas, reports and minutes are also available on the internet via the Council website along with Executive Members' and Officer decisions.</p> <p>Consideration of Partnership arrangements is not currently included in the Committee's terms of reference. However, a corporate Partnership Governance Framework is in place, which includes a Governance Checklist and the Committee receives a report on the Council's Significant Partnerships Register annually.</p>	4

2020/21 Member Attendance and Committee Work Programme

Only four meetings were held during the year due to the impact of the pandemic and the requirement for legislation to be enacted to allow virtual meetings to take place. The following Member attendance was recorded:

Councillor/Date	29 July 2020	26 November 2020	12 January 2021	30 March 2021
Ron Whittle - Chair	✓	✓	✓	✓
Maureen Bateson	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mahfooz Hussain	A	A	✓	✓
Andy Kay	✓	✓	✓	✓
Abdul Patel	A	A	✓	A
Neil Slater	A	A	✓	A

✓ = attended meeting A = sent apologies

N/A = Not a Committee Member at the time of the meeting.

Audit & Governance Committee Work Programme 2020/21					
PROGRAMME ACTIVITY:	TERMS OF REF. NUMBER	JULY	NOVEMBER	JANUARY	MARCH
Audit & Governance Committee Work Programme 2020/21					
Governance, Risk and Control					
Annual Statement (AGS)	1,2,4	✓			
AGS Progress Report	1,2			✓	
Risk Management Annual Report	4,5,6,7	✓			
Annual Counter Fraud Report	7,8,9	✓			
Annual Internal Audit Opinion Report	1,2,7	✓			
External Audit Findings incl VFM	3			✓	
External Audit Annual Audit Letter incl VFM Conclusion	4,5,7				✓
MAF Update	4,5,6		✓		
Risk Management Update	4,5,6		✓	✓	✓
IA Progress & Outcomes Report	4,5,6,7,8	✓	✓	✓	✓

PROGRAMME ACTIVITY:	TERMS OF REF. NUMBER	JULY	NOVEMBER	JANUARY	MARCH
Significant Partnerships Register	10				√
Internal Audit					
Annual Plan & Internal Audit Charter	1,2,3,4	√			√
IA Progress & Outcomes Report	3,4,5,7,8,11	√	√	√	√
Annual Internal Audit Opinion Report	4,6,9,10,11	√			
External Audit					
Annual Audit Letter	1,5,6				√
Audit Fee Letter	1,3,4,5	√			
Finalisation of Ext Audit Fees 2018/19	4,5	√			
External Audit Fees and Statutory Accounts Deadlines	4,5				√
Annual Plan	2,3,4	√			
Progress Report	2,3,5	√	√	√	√
External Audit Findings Report	2,5				√
Value For Money Conclusion	2,3,4,5				√
Financial Reporting					
Statement of Accounts	1			√	
External Audit Findings Report	1,2			√	
External Audit Annual Audit Letter	1,2				√
Treasury Management					
Strategy Report	1,2			√	√
Progress Report	1,2,3,4	√	√	√	√
Annual Outturn Report	1,2,3	√			
Accountability Arrangements					
Committee Annual Report	1,2,3	√			
Committee Self-Assessment	2,3				√

AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 29th July 2020

PRESENT – Councillor Ron Whittle in the Chair), Councillors Maureen Bateson and Andy Kay.

OFFICERS – Louise Mattinson, Colin Ferguson, and Phil Llewellyn (BwDBC), John Farrar and Gareth Winstanley (Grant Thornton).

ALSO PRESENT – Councillor Vicky McGurk, Executive Member for Finance and Governance.

RESOLUTIONS

1 **Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and read the notice that outlined the arrangements relating to the virtual meeting.

Apologies had been received from Councillors Abdul Patel, Neil Slater and Mahfooz Hussain.

2 **Minutes of the meeting held on 14th January 2020**

It was noted that there was no Members present who attended the last meeting.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14th January 2020 be submitted to the next meeting for approval.

3 **Declarations of Interest**

No Declarations of Interest were received.

4 **External Audit – Audit Scope and Fees**

John Farrar introduced Gareth Winstanley, who was the new Audit Manager from Grant Thornton for the Council.

The Committee was provided with a report on the Audit Plan and Fee for 2019/20, the 20/21 Scale Fee and the Public Sector Audit Appointments report on Future Procurement and Market Supply.

Members discussed the documents submitted, in particular the fees and fees variations, and whilst the pressures on external audit were noted, Members commented that the Council needed early notice of any proposed variations to fees. The Chair advised that any additional fees around remote working due to Covid-19 would be challenged, as it was felt that remote working for External Auditors should not incur costs for the Council.

The Committee noted Future Procurement and Market supply considerations, particularly in relation to the very competitive market

situation and the extra, complex work to be carried out by External Auditors.

RESOLVED – That the updates and information presented be noted.

5 Finalisation of External Audit Fees 2018/19

The Committee received a report on the outcome of the adjudication by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA) regarding the 2018/19 fee variation requested by the Council's External Auditors relating to the additional work needed to be carried out in respect of the 2018/19 Statement of Accounts.

The Council's External Auditors, Grant Thornton, requested the following variations to the PSAA Scale Fee in respect of completion of the Council's 2018/19 Financial Statements and work on the Value for Money conclusion; the original scale fee was set out in the Audit Fee letter presented to the Audit & Governance Committee in October 2018.

Following the PSAA adjudication, the adjustments were amended to £10,000 further to an email from the PSAA on 29 April 2020.

RESOLVED – That the Committee:

- Note the outcome of the adjudication by PSAA in respect of the 2018/19 External Audit fee variation and approve the proposed variation of £10,000.

6 External Audit Progress Report and Sector Update

John Farrar and Gareth Winstanley reported on the progress of Grant Thornton in delivering their responsibilities as External Auditors, and highlighted the emerging issues and developments nationally.

Initial planning for the 2019/20 audit began in March and work on financial statements would commence during the summer.

A VFM risk assessment had been undertaken and as part of work later in the year there would be a focus on two VFM significant risks, namely: Financial Sustainability and Implementation of regulator recommendations. Work undertaken would be reported in the Audit Findings Report and an opinion given on the Statement of Accounts ahead of the 30 November 2020 deadline.

In terms of Certification of claims and returns, in response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the DwP had moved the reporting deadline back to 31 January 2021, and discussions with the Council's Housing Benefit Section had begun about this work and certifying of the claim ahead of the deadline.

In relation to the Council's annual Teachers' Pensions return, the certification work for the 2019/20 claim was due to be completed in line with the national deadline.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

7 Treasury Management Report – March to May 2020

The Committee received a report which summarised the interest rate environment for the period March to May 2020 and the borrowing and lending transactions undertaken, together with the Council's overall debt position, and the position against Treasury and Prudential Indicators established by the Council.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

8 Treasury Management Annual Report 2019/20

The Committee received a report on the Treasury outturn for 2019/20, which had also been reported to the Executive Board on 9th July 2020 in the 2019/20 Outturn Corporate Monitoring Report.

RESOLVED – That the Outturn position for 2019/20 be noted.

9 Audit & Assurance – Progress and Outcomes to June 2020

Members were informed of the achievements and progress made by Audit & Assurance in the period from 1 December 2019 to 30 June 2020.

In terms of Corporate Governance and Risk, here were fourteen “red” priority areas/issues across the departments, by key themes, which had been identified in the summary Director Exception/Dashboard Report and Assurance Statements for the year-end, as at 31st March 2020.

This included ten “red” priorities that remained as areas of concern from 30th September 2019, two areas that had been upgraded and two new areas which appeared as red for the first time. There were also four areas of concern previously identified as “red” that had now been downgraded to “amber” in the period.

The report also highlighted Counter Fraud Activity and Internal Audits recently undertaken.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

10 Audit & Governance Plan 2020/21 and Internal Audit Charter

The Committee were presented with a report, informing Members of the planned Audit & Assurance work for the forthcoming year.

The Plan and Charter defined the scope and the rationale of the approach being followed.

The Internal Audit Charter was a requirement of the PSIAS, which became mandatory from 1 April 2013. The Charter was last re-approved at the Audit

& Governance Committee meeting on 11 April 2019 following the publication of updated PSIAS in March 2016. The Charter was reviewed and up-dated to reflect recent changes in the senior management structure and job titles at that time. No other changes were deemed necessary for 2020/21.

RESOLVED – That The Committee:

- approve the 2020/21 Audit & Assurance Plan (as set out in Appendices 1 and 2);
- approve the Internal Audit Charter (as set out in Appendix 3)
- note that reports dealing with both progress against the Plan and outcomes achieved will be submitted to each meeting; and
- note that Plan changes will be reported during the year.

11 Annual Risk Management Report 2019/20

Members received a report that informed the Audit & Governance Committee of the risk and related activity which has taken place or been delivered during 2019/20 and provide an overall conclusion of the effectiveness management arrangements which were in place within the Council.

The report covered the activities relating to the corporate and departmental risk management arrangements, emergency and business continuity planning, event management, information governance and insurance. It outlined the risk management policies and arrangements currently in place, activities which had taken place or been delivered during the last year directed at achieving the various risk objectives, and details of key actions or developments for 2019/20.

The details provided in the report provide evidence that, overall, the Council had adequate risk management arrangements in place and these had operated effectively during the year ended 31 March 2020. Areas for action or development during 2020/21 had been identified and would strengthen the existing systems and procedures in place.

The Committee discussed the impact of Covid-19 in terms of Risk, and the Executive Member for Finance and Governance, and Director of Finance outlined the latest position in terms of additional costs, loss of income, Government assistance available, minimum level of Reserves and the funding gap arising.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and that the Committee agree with the conclusion on the overall effectiveness of the Council's risk management arrangements in place during 2019/20.

12 Annual Counter Fraud Report 2019/20

A report was submitted informing the Audit & Governance Committee of the results of the counter fraud activity that had been carried out during the year ended 31 March 2020 to minimise the risk of fraud, bribery and corruption occurring in the Council, and the outcome of investigations carried out into potential or suspected fraud or irregularities.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

13 Annual Internal Audit Opinion Report 2019/20

Members received a report which provided independent evidence to allow it to fulfil its role and function of providing independent assurance to the Council on the adequacy of the risk management and internal control arrangements within the Council.

RESOLVED -

That the Committee:

- note the content of the Annual Internal Audit Opinion Report for 2019/20 (as set out in Appendix A);
- note the overall annual opinion of the Head of Audit & Assurance, which is that **adequate assurance**, can be placed upon the Council's framework of governance, risk management and internal control; and
- note that the internal audit work that supports this opinion has been delivered in accordance with the Public sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and that there are no significant areas of non-conformance.

14 Annual Governance Statement for 2019/20

The Committee was presented with the Draft Annual Governance Statement for 2019/20.

RESOLVED – That the Annual Governance Statement for 2019/20 be noted.

15 Audit & Governance Committee Annual Report 2019/20

The Committee received the draft Audit & Governance Committee Annual Report, which summarised the work undertaken by the Committee during the year to demonstrate that it had fulfilled its agreed terms of reference.

RESOLVED – That the Committee:

- approve the Committee's Annual Report, including the statement on its effectiveness during 2019/20 and the draft effectiveness self-assessment evaluation; and
- request that the Full Council endorse the report.

Signed:

Date:

Chair of the meeting
at which the minutes were confirmed

AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Thursday, 26 November 2020

PRESENT – Councillors Ron Whittle (Chair), Maureen Bateson, Mahfooz Hussain and Andy Kay

OFFICERS – Louise Mattinson (Director of Finance), Colin Ferguson (Head of Service Audit and Assurance), Firoza Hafeji (Governance Officer), Phil Llewellyn (Corporate and Democratic Lead) and John Farrar (Grant Thornton)

ALSO PRESENT – Councillor Vicky McGurk, Executive Member for Finance and Governance.

RESOLUTIONS

16 **Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and read the notice that outlined the arrangements relating to the virtual meeting.

17 **Minutes of the last meetings held on 14th January 2020 and 29th July 2020**

The Minutes of the meetings held on 14th January 2020 and 29th July 2020 were moved as a correct record.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meetings held on 14th January 2020 and 29th July 2020 be agreed as a correct record.

18 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

19 **External Audit: Progress Report 2019/20**

John Farrar gave a verbal update on the progress of Grant Thornton in delivering their responsibilities as External Auditors, and highlighted the emerging issues and developments nationally.

Members were informed that due to Covid-19 ongoing sickness absence the Councils external audit had been further delayed to October – November 2020. The External Audit Plan 2019/20 was shared with Committee in previous meetings and no further issues identified.

The audit was progressing well and no matters arising to date. Weekly progress update calls were being held between the external auditors and the Council Finance team.

The External Audit finding report would be brought to the Audit & Governance Committee meeting to be held on 12th January 2021.

RESOLVED –

- That the updates and information presented be noted.
- That the External Audit Finding Report be brought to the next Audit & Governance Committee meeting to be held on 12th January 2021.

20 Treasury Management Report - June to August 2020

The Director of Finance & Customer Services presented the Committee with a report on Treasury Management activity including a Mid-year Strategy Review for 2020/21. The report summarised the interest rate environment for the period and borrowing and lending transactions undertaken, together with the Council's overall debt position, and the position against Treasury and Prudential Indicators established by the Council.

Members noted the weekly movement in the totals available for investment, both actually to date and projections for the rest of the year. These balances had fluctuated significantly across the period, ranging between £40M and £60M. Investment balances were unusually high during this period, because of funds received from central government. Funds received from central government included both grants received in advance of their usual payment dates and additional funds in respect of extra costs and the distribution of grants to small businesses in relation to the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is intended that investment balances will ultimately reduce in future to between £10M and £20M.

Louise Mattinson highlighted that at 31st August, the Council had approximately £40.4M invested, compared to £45.7M at the start of the period. The breakdown of the closing investment balance was shared with the Committee.

The financial implications arising from the Treasury Management activities are reflected in the Council's overall Budget Strategy, and in ongoing budget monitoring throughout the year.

The budgets were monitored monthly and vital information collated which highlighted the additional cost received and the total loss of income due to Covid-19. Some of the loss of income due to Covid-19 was eligible for compensation from MHCLG.

RESOLVED – That the Committee noted the Treasury Management Report – 2020/21.

21 Audit & Assurance - Progress & Outcomes to September 2020

The Head of Audit & Assurance reported on the achievements and progress made by Audit & Assurance in the period from 1st July 2020 to 30th September 2020.

In terms of Corporate Governance and Risk there were nine "red" priority areas/issues across departments, by key themes, which had been identified in the summary of Director Exception/Dashboard Report and Assurance Statements for the half-year, as at 30th September 2020.

This included eight “red” priorities that remained as areas of concern from 31st March 2020 and one area had been upgraded. There were six areas of concern previously identified as “red” that had now been downgraded to “amber” or “green” in the period.

The report also highlighted Counter Fraud Activity and Internal Audits recently undertaken.

In response to questions raised by the Committee Colin Ferguson agreed to get further information from the relevant departments on the Sickness Absence theme, to identify why the priority had moved from “red” to “amber” during the Covid-19 pandemic.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

22 Risk Management - 2020/21 Quarter 1 Review

Colin Ferguson summarised the Risk Management report for quarter 1 in the period from 1st April 2020 to 30th June 2020.

The Committee were asked to:

- Discuss, review and challenge the progress made on the Corporate Risk Register as at the end of Quarter 1 2020/21;
- Note the risk management activity that had occurred during the period; and
- Consider the selection of Corporate Risk for the Committee to undertake a review of its assessment, control and monitoring at its next meeting.

The Corporate Risk Register contained 15 open risks at 30th June 2020.

A summary of the corporate risk details was shared with the Committee which identified that the residual risk score relating to risk 14, Safeguarding, had been increased due to the impact that Covid-19 has had on the work that Children’s Social Care carried out with the wider community.

The top three corporate risks as at 30th June 2020 were shared with Members of the Committee.

Officers have continued to liaise with colleagues across the Council to identify areas to make use of the risk management support that was available from Zurich Municipal as part of the current long term insurance agreement. Since May 2020 Zurich have provided a series of monthly webinars on a wide range of topics which have included safeguarding during lockdown, a look at the risk landscape for public services now and in the future, the impact of Covid-19 on mental wellness, Adult Social Care post Covid-19 and emerging risk management considerations for highways.

Zurich published a wider range of guidance notes during the period which covered topics such as risk control measures for the temporary closure of premises, managing additional homeworking exposure, working from home display screen equipment (DSE) risk assessments, the cyber dimension of the corona virus, planning for a return to the workplace and guidance for reopening schools.

The Committee then considered a Corporate Risk to look at the next meeting, and agreed that No.21 which related to the business continuity arrangements in place to enable the Council to recover its critical functions, core services and income generating functions during the transition and recovery phase of the Covid-19 outbreak be reviewed.

RESOLVED –

- That the report be noted
- That Corporate Risk No.21 be reviewed at the next meeting

Signed:

Date:

Chair of the meeting
at which the minutes were confirmed

AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 12 January 2021

PRESENT – Councillors Ron Whittle (Chair), Maureen Bateson, Mahfooz Hussain, Andy Kay, Abdul Patel and Neil Slater

OFFICERS – David Fairclough (Director of HR, Governance and Engagement), Louise Mattinson (Director of Finance), Colin Ferguson (Head of Service Audit and Assurance), Simon Ross (Head of Service for Finance), Julie Jewson (Senior Finance Manager), Jody Spencer-Anforth (Finance Manager), Firoza Hafeji (Governance Officer), Gareth Winstanley (Grant Thornton) and John Farrar (Grant Thornton)

ALSO PRESENT – Councillor Vicky McGurk, Executive Member for Finance and Governance.

RESOLUTIONS

23 **Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and read the notice that outlined the arrangements relating to the virtual meeting.

24 **Declaration of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

25 **Minutes of the Meeting held on 26th November 2020**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26th November 2020 were moved as a correct record.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meetings held on 26th November 2020 be agreed as a correct record.

26 **Statement of Accounts Highlights**

The Director of Finance, Louise Mattinson and Senior Finance Manager, Julie Jewson delivered a presentation on the Statement of Accounts 2019/20 and outlined the main features, highlighting key facts and figures for consideration by the Committee.

RESOLVED – That the Committee noted the Statement of Accounts.

27 **External Audit: Audit Findings Report 2019/20**

John Farrar, Engagement Lead, Grant Thornton, presented a report which outlined the key Audit Findings for Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council for the Year ended 31st March 2020.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic has had a significant impact on the normal operations of the Council. The audit risk assessment was updated to consider the impact of the pandemic on the audit and included

an additional financial statement risk in respect of Covid-19 within the Audit Plan issued on 5th October 2020.

The audit work was completed remotely during July-December and the findings were summarised in the report. Three adjustments to the primary financial statements were made by management resulting in a £4.950M increase in the deficit on provision of services within the Statement of Comprehensive Income and Expenditure. A small number of disclosure adjustments had also been agreed with officers as detailed in the report. One unadjusted mis-statement was identified where the Heritage Assets had been understated in the balance sheet by £1.327M as a result of the register of heritage assets not being updated to reflect recent valuations. Management chose not to make the adjustments as it was not a material change and included it as an action for the future.

Members and Officers made comments and observations of the audit findings and thanks were passed to auditors and finance officers for their assistance during field work.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

28 **Statement of Accounts 2019/20**

A report was submitted, which outlined the issues arising from the external audit of the Council's 2019/20 Statement of Accounts, and requested Audit and Governance Committees approval of the audited accounts prior to their publication, as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 required that the draft accounts be produced and authorised for issue by the Council's Director of Finance and Customer Service by 21st May each year. Following external audit review, the accounts should be approved by members, having considered the issues raised by the auditors in their Audit Findings Report, prior to publication by the 31st July following the year to which they relate. Due to the impact of COVID-19, regulations were issued to extend the statutory audit deadlines for 2019/20 for all local authorities. The impact for the Council was that the publication date for final, audited, accounts was moved from 21st July to 30th November 2020. This meant that draft accounts were to be approved by 31st August 2020 at the latest. This would enable the Audit and Governance Committee to review and approve the accounts, having considered the issues raised by the auditors in their Audit Findings Report.

The 2019/20 draft Statement of Accounts were certified by the Director of Finance on 2nd July 2020, and subsequently published on the Council's website. The audit of those draft accounts commenced in September 2020 and amendments had been made to the accounts in line with audit findings to date.

The external audit of the accounts was not concluded in time for the accounts to be published by 30th November, in the main due to the additional time required to complete additional audit work regarding the valuation of the Council's land and buildings assets. This was the case for numerous local authorities across the country.

In order to comply with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, a notice had been published on the Council's website stating that the statement of accounts could not currently be published, and confirming that the accounts would be published as soon as reasonably practicable after the receipt of a report from the auditor which contains the auditor's final findings from their audit and the issue of their audit opinion.

The Audit Findings Report, used by the Council's external auditor, Grant Thornton, highlighted the key findings arising from the final accounts audit in order that those charged with Governance may consider the issues prior to their approval of the Statement of Accounts.

A number of adjustments were made to the Statement of Accounts published on 2nd July 2020 in order to correct misstatements and misclassifications and to enhance the Narrative Report and disclosure notes. There was also one unadjusted misstatement included in the Audit Findings Report, in relation to the revaluation of Heritage Assets. These amounts had not been adjusted in the 2019/20 Statement of Accounts as they were immaterial to the results of the Council and its financial position at 31st March 2020, although they will be addressed in the 2020/21 accounts.

RESOLVED – That the Audit and Governance Committee:

1. Note the outcome of the audit of the Council's financial statements and the Value for Money conclusion as presented by Grant Thornton in their Audit Findings Report for 2019/20 (previous agenda item).
2. Approve the Statement of Accounts for 2019/20.
3. Approve the letter of representation from the Director of Finance and Customer Service to the external auditors for which a draft is provided at Appendix 1, with the final version to be signed by the Director of Finance and Customer Service and the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee at the date of issue of the audit opinion.

29 Treasury Management Report - September to November 2020

The Director of Finance presented the Committee with a report on Treasury Management activity for the period of 1st September 2020 – 30th November 2020. The report summarised the interest rate environment for the period and borrowing and lending transactions undertaken, together with the Council's overall debt position, and the position against Treasury and Prudential Indicators established by the Council.

Members noted the weekly movement in the totals available for investment, both actually to date and projections for the rest of the year. These balances had fluctuated significantly across the period, ranging between £35M and £60M. Investment balances continued to be unusually high during this period, because of funds received from central government. Funds received from central government included both grants received in advance of their usual payment dates and additional funds in respect of extra costs and the distribution of grants to businesses, in relation to the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is intended that investment balances will ultimately reduce in future to between £10M and £20M.

Louise Mattinson highlighted that at 30th November, the Council had approximately £59.9M invested, compared to £40.4M at the start of the period. The breakdown of the closing investment balance was shared with the Committee.

The financial implications arising from the Treasury Management activities were reflected in the Council's overall Budget Strategy, and in ongoing budget monitoring throughout the year.

RESOLVED – That the Committee noted the Treasury Management Report – 2020/21.

30 Audit & Assurance - Progress & Outcomes to November 2020

The Head of Audit & Assurance reported on the achievements and progress made by Audit & Assurance in the period from 1st October 2020 to 30th November 2020.

The Committee were asked to discuss, review and challenge the outcomes achieved to 30th November 2020 against the annual 2020/21 Audit & Assurance Plan, as approved by the Committee on 29th July 2020.

The internal audit function is required to comply with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). The PSIAS requires the Head of Internal Audit to communicate any significant governance, risk management and control issues identified to the Audit and Governance Committee during the year. Members were informed that the work completed to date has not identified any significant control or governance issues that would affect the overall control framework in place within the Council to bring to the Committee's attention at this time.

The report also highlighted Counter Fraud Activity and Internal Audits recently undertaken.

Members noted that five internal audits were completed and finalised since the last report to the Committee.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

31 Annual Governance Statement - Progress on 2019/20 Actions and Plan for 2020/21

Members were informed on progress of the actions taken to address the significant governance issues identified in the 2019/20 AGS and the planned approach and timetable for producing the 2020/21 Statement.

The Accounts & Audit Regulations required that the Council must publish an AGS on an annual basis in accordance with proper practice. The Audit & Governance Committee was also required to review and provide independent assurance on the Council's governance framework.

The following significant issues were noted in the 2019/20 AGS:

- Children's Services Financial Position - action brought forward from 2017/18);
- Adult Social Care Commissioning – 2019/20 action; and
- Impact of COVID-19 on the financial position of the Council – 2019/20 action.

Details of the progress made to 30th November for each of these areas was provided in Appendix 1. These showed that appropriate steps had been taken by senior officers and managers in respect of the issues identified and that these were largely in accordance with the expected targets. However, the commentary notes that there was still volatility in Children's Services commissioning and there was the potential for numbers and costs to increase. There was also a level of uncertainty in these areas depending on the impact of the second wave of the pandemic, the winter demand pressures and the possibility of a third wave.

The approach and proposed timetable for 2020/21 were also outlined.

RESOLVED –

- That the progress made to address the significant actions identified in the 2019/20 AGS be reviewed; and
- That the approach/timetable for producing the 2020/21 AGS be noted.

32 Risk Management - 2020/21 Quarter 2 Review

Colin Ferguson summarised the Risk Management report for Quarter 2 in the period from 1st June 2020 to 30th September 2020.

The Committee were asked to:

- Discuss, review and challenge the progress made on the Corporate Risk Register as at the end of Quarter 2 2020/21;
- Note the risk management activity that had occurred during the period; and
- Consider the selection of Corporate Risk for the Committee to undertake a review of its assessment, control and monitoring at its next meeting.

The Corporate Risk Register contained 15 open risks at 30th September 2020.

A summary of the corporate risk details was shared with the Committee which identified that the Corporate Risk 21, the risk the Council was unable to recover its critical functions, core services and income generating functions, during the transition and recovery phases of a COVID-19 outbreak has been closed due to the increase in the rate of Covid-19 infections in the borough, and the move into tier 3 restrictions. Instead Corporate risk 20, relating to the delivery of critical and core services and functions during the response and mitigation phase of the Covid-19 outbreak, has been re-opened.

The top three corporate risks as at 30th September 2020 were shared with Members of the Committee.

Officers have continued to make use of the risk management support that is available from Zurich Municipal as part of the current long term insurance

agreement. As well as a series of webinars, Zurich delivered a Digital Customer Week in November covering a wide range of topics.

Zurich published a wider range of guidance notes during the period which covered topics such as risk control measures for the temporary closure of premises, managing additional homeworking exposure, working from home display screen equipment (DSE) risk assessments, the cyber dimension of the corona virus, guidance on moving from response to recovery, planning for a return to the workplace and guidance for reopening schools.

The Committee then considered a Corporate Risk to look at the next meeting, and agreed that No.15 which related to comply with Health & Safety legislation and provide both a safe working environment for employees and the provision of a safe environment for service users be reviewed.

RESOLVED –

- That the report be noted
- That Corporate Risk No.15 be reviewed at the next meeting

Signed:

Date:

Chair of the meeting
at which the minutes were confirmed

AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 30 March 2021

PRESENT – Councillors Ron Whittle (Chair), Maureen Bateson, Mahfooz Hussain and Andy Kay

OFFICERS – Louise Mattinson (Director of Finance), Colin Ferguson (Head of Service Audit and Assurance), Firoza Hafeji (Governance Officer) and John Farrar (Grant Thornton)

ALSO PRESENT – Councillor Vicky McGurk, Executive Member for Finance and Governance.

RESOLUTIONS

33 **Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and read the notice that outlined the arrangements relating to the virtual meeting.

Apologies had been received from Councillor Abdul Patel.

34 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

35 **Minutes of the Meeting held on 12th January 2021.**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12th January 2021 were moved as a correct record.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meetings held on 12th January 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

36 **External Audit- Annual Audit Letter**

The External Audit Annual Audit Letter for Year Ended 31st March 2020 was submitted.

RESOLVED – That the External Audit Annual Audit Letter for Year Ended 31st March 2020 be noted.

37 **External Audit Fees and Statutory Accounts Audit Deadlines**

The Committee was provided with a report highlighting the update on the latest position with regard to External Audit Fees for 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 and an update in respect of developments in the audit regulation timetable for 2020/21.

The Director of Finance, Louise Mattinson explained that the impact of Covid-19 has led to an increase in work Grant Thornton had to complete, and in the time it took to complete this work due to revisiting planning, increased risk around managements assumption and estimates, more detailed work on financial resilience, and remote working – in addition to the base fee of

£79,186 and the £11,000 of variations previously reported to the Committee in July 2020, Grant Thornton are now estimating that a further charge of £18,037 is required bringing the total external audit fee to £108,223 to cover areas which included:

- Revisiting planning
- Management's assumptions and estimates
- Financial resilience assessment
- Remote working

Members discussed the report and the additional charges. The Chair requested that Grant Thornton provide the Council with a satisfactory breakdown of the additional charge of £18,037.

RESOLVED –

- That the contents of the report be noted;
- That the final External Audit Fee for 2019/20 of £108,223 be approved, subject to the Director of Finance receiving a satisfactory breakdown of the additional variations.

38 External Audit- Audit Committee Progress Report

John Farrar reported on the progress of Grant Thornton in delivering their responsibilities as External Auditors, and highlighted the emerging national issues and developments.

Initial planning for the 2020/21 audit began in March and the audit plan summarising the approach to key risks will be shared with the Audit & Governance Committee in June 2021.

On 1st April 2020, the National Audit Office introduced a new Code of Audit Practice which comes into effect from audit year 2020/21. The most significant change in the Code is the introduction of a new 'Auditor's Annual Report', which brings together the results of all the auditor's work across the year.

There are three main changes arising from the NAO's new approach:

- A new set of key criteria, covering governance, financial sustainability and improvements in economy, efficiency and effectiveness
- More extensive reporting, with a requirement on the auditor to produce a commentary on arrangements across all of the key criteria, rather than the current 'reporting by exception' approach
- The replacement of binary (qualified/unqualified) approach to VfM conclusions, with far more sophisticated judgements on performance, as well as key recommendations on any significant weaknesses in arrangements identified during the audit

The implications of the VfM requirements was shared with the Committee which highlighted that the changes will help pave the way for a new relationship between auditors and audited bodies which is based around constructive challenge and a drive for improvement.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

39 Treasury Management Report- December 2020 to February 2021.

The Director of Finance presented the Committee with a report on Treasury Management activity for the period of 1st December 2020 – 28th February 2021. The report summarised the interest rate environment for the period and the borrowing and lending transactions undertaken, together with the Council's overall debt position, and the position against Treasury and Prudential Indicators established by the Council.

RESOLVED – That the Committee noted the Treasury Management position for the period, and the Treasury Management Strategy for 2021/22.

40 Audit and Assurance -Progress and Outcomes to February 2021

The Head of Audit & Assurance reported on the achievements and progress made by Audit & Assurance in the period from 1st December 2020 to 28th February 2021.

The Committee were asked to discuss, review and challenge the outcomes achieved to 28th February 2021 against the annual 2020/21 Audit & Assurance Plan, as approved by the Committee on 29th July 2020.

The internal audit function is required to comply with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). The PSIAS requires the Head of Internal Audit to communicate any significant governance, risk management and control issues identified to the Audit & Governance Committee during the year. Members were informed that the work completed to date has not identified any significant governance, risk management or control issues to bring to the Committee's attention at this time.

The report also highlighted Counter Fraud Activity and Internal Audits recently undertaken.

Members noted that five internal audits were completed and finalised since the last report to the Committee.

Colin highlighted that the Departmental Business Plan included seven targets to achieve the strategic aims. The defined targets and actual performance for the latest period and the previous period were noted by Members. A brief commentary on the measure where performance in the period had fallen below the agreed targets was shared with the Committee.

RESOLVED – That the Committee discussed, reviewed and challenged the outcomes achieved to 28th February 2021 against the annual 2020/21 Audit & Assurance Plan, as approved by the Committee on 29th July 2020.

41 Audit and Assurance Plan 2021/22 and Internal Audit Charter

The Committee were presented with a report, informing Members of the planned Audit & Assurance work for the forthcoming year.

The Plan and Charter defined the scope and the rationale of the approach being followed.

The Plan as a whole, is also a product of consultations with Directors and their Management Teams, and the Corporate Leadership Team, which were undertaken in February/March. Later in 2021/22 further consultations will be held to ensure that the Plan continues to meet the stated objectives. Any significant changes to reflect new developments, changes to priorities and/or resources will be reported to the Audit & Governance Committee.

The Internal Audit Charter was a requirement of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS), which became mandatory from 1 April 2013. The Charter was last re-approved at the Audit & Governance Committee meeting on in July 2020. The Charter has been reviewed and up-dated to reflect recent changes in the senior management job titles. No other changes were deemed necessary for 2020/21.

RESOLVED – That the Committee:

- Approve the 2021/22 Audit & Assurance Plan (as set out in Appendices 1 and 2);
- Approve the Internal Audit Charter (as set out in Appendix 3)
- Note that reports dealing with both progress against the Plan and outcomes achieved will be submitted to each meeting; and
- Note that Plan changes will be reported during the year.

42 Risk Management- 2020/21 Quarter 3 Review

Colin Ferguson summarised the Risk Management report for Quarter 3 in the period from 1st October 2020 to 31st December 2020.

The Committee were asked to:

- Discuss, review and challenge the progress made on the Corporate Risk Register as at the end of Quarter 3 2020/21; and
- Note the risk management activity that had occurred during the period

The Corporate Risk Register contained 15 open risks at 31st December 2020.

The top three corporate risks as at that date were shared with Members of the Committee.

As part of the Council's Risk Management process the Corporate Risks are reviewed and monitored on a regular basis to ensure that the Council have appropriate, properly assessed corporate risks identified going forward. The Corporate Leadership Team review the risk details as part of the Management Accountability Framework reporting arrangements, as well as the on-going review and update of the risks by the designated risk owners and key contacts.

Officers have continued to make use of the risk management support that is available as part of the current long term insurance agreement that the Council have with Zurich Municipal.

Zurich published a wider range of guidance notes during the pandemic which covered topics such as risk control measures for the temporary closure of premises, managing additional homeworking exposure, working from home display screen equipment (DSE) risk assessments, the cyber dimension of the

corona virus, guidance on moving from response to recovery, planning for a return to the workplace and guidance for reopening schools. A series of risk insight podcasts have also been made available to Zurich customers to provide support through the period.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

43 Audit and Governance Committee Effectiveness Assessment 2020/21

The Committee were presented with the results of the annual assessment of compliance of the Audit & Governance Committee against recognised best practise recommended by CIPFA as well as a summary of Committee members' own self-assessments. The results of the various assessments were set out in appendices 1, 2 and 3 to the report.

The details included at Appendix 3 provided a summary of the responses received from the Councillors who have been members of the Committee during the Municipal Year. This also included a comparison with the results from the previous year. The overall results show that there is a belief by the members that the Committee is operating effectively, with average scores of satisfactory/partly agree or better for most questions.

The Council's Audit & Governance Committee arrangements were largely compliant with the recommended guidance. The only areas where full compliance could not be provided was:

- Question 19: The Audit & Governance Committee has not obtained feedback from others interacting or relying on its work.

However, the Committee's Annual Report was presented to Full Council for consideration, along with the minutes from the previous year's messages. This presents an opportunity to obtain feedback from Councillor colleagues at least annually.

The evaluation of effectiveness document (Appendix 2) had been completed by the Head of Audit & Assurance on behalf of the Committee. The previous version was appended to the Audit & Governance Committee's annual report considered by this Committee on 29th July 2020. It noted the additional challenge of corporate risks that the Committee now carried out on a regular basis, and the senior officer attendance at its meetings to update Members on progress of agreed actions from key reports. It also noted that the Committee now received a Counter Fraud Annual Report.

Across five areas the score was evaluated at 4 out of a possible 5, demonstrating: "clear evidence from some sources that the Committee is actively and effectively supporting improvement across some aspects of this area". For the remaining four areas evaluated, the assessed score was 5, demonstrating: "clear evidence is available from a number of sources that the committee is actively supporting improvements across all aspects of this area. The improvements made are clearly identifiable".

RESOLVED – That the Committee note and approve:

- That the Audit & Governance Committee’s position when compared to the CIPFA good practice checklist (Appendix 1) and the additional actions noted;
- That the Evaluation of Effectiveness of the Audit & Governance Committee, produced by the Head of Audit & Assurance on behalf of the Chair of the Committee (Appendix 2); and,
- That the summary results from the individual Committee member self-assessments of the overall effectiveness of the Committee (Appendix 3).

44 Significant Partnerships Register 2020/21

Members noted the update report submitted on Significant Partnerships Register 2020/21. The Register identified all the significant partnerships the local authority was involved in as per the Audit & Governance Committee’s Terms of Reference.

The Significant Partnerships Register was developed to determine what partnerships exist across the Council and of these, which ones would class as ‘significant’ (as defined by the Council’s Code of Corporate Governance). The Register provides an annual opportunity to ensure that partnerships throughout the local authority are well governed and that appropriate oversight is in place.

The Significant Partnerships Register 2020/21 has been updated with new partnerships, some of which have been created to support the Council’s and Lancashire Resilience Forum’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The nature of the pandemic has resulted in over twenty-five groups being involved in the response (appendix 2). Whilst not all of these groups are new or can be classified as significant partnerships, it highlights the breadth of partners involved in the response.

New partnerships included in the register this year were noted as:

- Local Outbreak Engagement Board
- Health Protection Board
- Barnfield Blackburn Ltd

The complete updated Register was shared with the Committee in Appendix A.

RESOLVED – That the Audit & Governance Committee reviewed and approved the significant partnerships submitted for inclusion in the 2020/21 register.

Signed:

Date:

Chair of the meeting
at which the minutes were confirmed

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR MOHAMMED KHAN

Date: 22nd July 2021

COVID-19

Residents and businesses in Blackburn with Darwen have been under some form of restrictions since March 2020. The Prime Minister's announcement on 12th July around the lifting of all legal restrictions on 19th July helps us look forward to a more normal way of life in how we live, work and socialise. However, rates in Blackburn with Darwen and across Lancashire continue to be higher than the England average therefore I would like to urge residents to continue to participate in rapid testing programmes and to book a PCR test if they feel unwell with covid symptoms.

We all need to learn to live with the virus, but we must use our common sense and I ask you all that you continue to take personal responsibility, as you have done throughout the pandemic. Whilst face masks and social distancing are no longer required from 19th July, I would like to ask residents to continue to wear face masks in enclosed public spaces, including on public transport.

For anyone who tests positive, information about self-isolation support, including financial support, is available online at www.blackburn.gov.uk/coronavirus/support-residents. We have revised our local scheme to support more people who cannot work from home while they self-isolate or parents/carers of children who are self-isolating.

I would also like to ask all residents over the age of 18 to take up the offer of a covid vaccination as soon as possible and to make sure that they attend their appointment for a second dose after 8 weeks. It is only through a successful vaccination programme that we can return to a normal way of life in Blackburn with Darwen and across the country.

I want to take this opportunity to say thank you to everybody who has been involved in the Covid response to date. Numerous residents, charities, volunteers, staff and business owners have selflessly done everything they can to support our borough and communities in its fight against Covid-19. I would also like to thank the Army and the Neighbourhood teams for their efforts during the surge testing and surge vaccinations. Please continue to stay safe and look after each other.

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

Our Community, Our Future social integration programme

Following a recommissioning exercise earlier this year, the following social integration projects are now underway:

- **Youth Ambassadors** – the Strategic Youth Alliance is leading the project, working with seven local organisations on a variety of programmes that bring together 12 to 18 year olds through shared interests, including music, art and outdoor pursuits. The BANNED Cohesion project, which involves some Youth Ambassadors from One Voice Blackburn, was recently featured on BBC North West Tonight as a good example of young people from different cultures working together creatively.
- **Community Ambassadors** – Spring North are once again leading this project and have recruited 29 local people who are meeting online each week on the 12 week course. Ambassadors who took part during Year 1 are also being encouraged to get involved and support this year's project.
- **Workforce Integration Ambassadors** – Earlier this month, Blackburn College launched the first cohort of Workforce Integration Ambassadors gathered from 16 local businesses. This year's programme is supported by Ambassadors who completed the programme in 2019/20, to share how they implemented their learning in their own work environments to help create and retain more diverse workforces.

Thousands of pounds in Our Community, Our Future grants is about to be awarded to a number of local groups and organisations for projects with social integration at their core. More details about projects will be released following conclusion of the grant award process.

The Learning English Together website is currently undergoing improvements and a PR and marketing campaign is planned to recruit more learners onto ESOL courses starting in September.

Community Volunteer Awards 2021

I would like to give everyone a reminder that nominations are open for this year's Community Volunteer Awards to celebrate the heroic work and achievements of our borough's volunteers.

The Community Volunteer Awards ceremony will take place on Wednesday, November 3rd at King George's Hall. The awards unfortunately had to be postponed last year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Over the last year as we tackled the pandemic, our borough's volunteers and helpers rose to the challenge more than ever in response and this is a wonderful opportunity to highlight the amazing work they did.

The awards celebrate all the dedicated and hardworking people and groups who make a difference in Blackburn and Darwen and help to make it a better place.

Nominations are now open at [Community Volunteer Awards – Community CVS](#). The closing date for nominations is Friday, August 27th at 5pm.

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

Together an Active Future (TaAF) - Sport England

I am pleased to report that Sport England have confirmed that they will be continuing and expanding their partnership with Pennine Lancashire, giving approval to move forward into the Accelerator phase of the Local Delivery Programme. This is an excellent endorsement of the approach and progress achieved so far and means that over the next four years there will be continued investment of time, energy and resources into Blackburn with Darwen as part of the wider work, securing additional capacity for local partners, organisations and residents to shape local change, develop activities and influence delivery.

Throughout the difficult last 12 months we know that walking and cycling are things that people have enjoyed and want to do more of. As part of the (TaAF) investment in Blackburn with Darwen a new Walking and Cycling Partnership Coordinator role has been appointed, seconded from a local, partner organisation to support this and move opportunities forward more quickly. The role will aim to provide cross-sector and cross-organisational leadership and coordination across Blackburn with Darwen and bring together all the great work that's already taking place in a more aligned and joined up way to encourage more people to choose walking and cycling as part of their everyday activities.

Thank you on behalf of everyone involved with TaAF for the time, energy and ideas you have offered so far. We're really looking forward to building upon everything we've done and learnt from so far and maximising the difference we can make for people and partners across Pennine Lancashire and beyond.

Health and Care Integration

We are delighted to share the news that two new Integrated Neighbourhood Team Clinical Co-ordinators have recently been recruited and are now in post. Working as part of the East, North, Darwen and West Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs), their role is to ensure local people and patients who are in need of integrated care service provision the most, are identified as effectively as possible whilst ensuring services are person centred and provided in a co-ordinated way. Over the next few months the Clinical Co-ordinators will be focusing on the completion of a robust induction plan, building relationships with Primary Care and promoting the work of the INTs.

The Social Prescribing Alliance which meets on a monthly basis continues to expand and has now reached a membership of over 45 community based partners. The focus of the Alliance is to complement existing services and pathways to help improve the physical and mental well-being of local people. Membership includes a team of Social Prescribing Link Workers, the new Integrated Neighbourhood Team Clinical Co-ordinators and two Trainee Associate Psychological Practitioners. The Alliance is an important partnership which forms part of a community based early intervention and prevention offer within the four neighbourhoods of Blackburn with Darwen.

Following the last report a service supporting the health needs of homeless people across Pennine Lancashire continues to expand. Since the service commenced, over 250 homeless people residing in Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO's) across Pennine Lancashire have been supported to improve their health and wellbeing. Each person has had a health needs assessment completed by a Clinical Occupational Therapist and been offered a range of health, care and community services and support through a partnership consisting of Transforming Lives, the BwD Complex Case Panel, Probation Service, Police, Inspire and Local Primary Care.

Health and Wellbeing Board

On 12th July, the Health and Wellbeing Board held its fifth meeting since the introduction of restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The agenda included a range of non COVID-19 specific items including; Live Well Annual Update, Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment Update and the Better Care Fund Update. In addition to the items above, the COVID Situational Awareness report was presented and a report on the Community Wellbeing Pathway for Long Covid. This meeting was held in person, following a change in guidance for Public Meetings.

Council: Delivered by a strong and resilient Council

Srebrenica anniversary

The Mayor Cllr Derek Hardman took part in an online commemorative event to mark Srebrenica Memorial Day which takes place on 11th July each year. The event marks the anniversary of a massacre that resulted in the deaths of more than 8,000 Muslim Bosnians and is the only holocaust committed in Europe since World War Two. It has been over 25 years since the massacre took place but we can still learn lessons from it. Reflecting on such events provides us with the impetus to work harder to create safer and more tolerant communities. Our borough is made up of diverse and vibrant communities and we are proud of how different backgrounds, nationalities, cultures, faiths, ages and genders come together to support and look after each other. Blackburn with Darwen always has been and always will be against hatred and intolerance of any kind. We passed a Council motion in July 2016 condemning racism, xenophobia and hate crime unequivocally and the motion was reconfirmed in October 2019 to incorporate Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. The events of Srebrenica are a stark reminder of what can happen if we allow hatred and intolerance to go unchallenged.

Communications & Media

The team continues to deliver both COVID and non-COVID content and messages supporting Council priorities across multiple channels including local media such as the Lancashire Telegraph, social media, digital screens and bus stops. On average the team is dealing with around 40 media queries a week from international, national, regional and local media on a variety of topics. A major focus is supporting the NHS delivery of the vaccination programme by promoting the benefits of getting the jab through local people sharing their experiences. Members are encouraged to take part and share why they wanted to get vaccinated. They can get involved in the campaign by contacting Ben Greenwood at ben.greenwood@blackburn.gov.uk

MJ Award

The Council's Senior Leadership Team has been nominated for a 'Best in Senior Leadership' award at the MJ Local Government Achievement Awards 2021. The nomination is testament to the hard work and dedication of the whole workforce and it is a fantastic opportunity to showcase the work that the Senior Leadership Task has undertaken through the 'One Council, One Team' approach.

Media Award Shortlist

Our *Picture This* campaign was shortlisted for an award in the Public Relations and Communications Association DARE Awards. This campaign was developed using behaviour change communications principles to help share public health information about advice about following restrictions through engaging stories from local people sharing the things they were looking forward to in a post-Covid world. Sadly, we did not win the award, but it was an honour to be shortlisted alongside some large corporate PR and marketing agencies from across the North West.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE 27th July 2021

COUNCILLOR VICKY McGURK

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICERS: DAVID FAIRCLOUGH

People: A good quality of life for all our residents

Revenues and Benefits

Business Rates

In line with Government policy, the payment of Business Rate grants ceased on the 30th June, as a consequence, no further application can now be considered. The focus for the team has now moved to the preparation for the Discretionary Covid relief scheme. This scheme will be applicable to businesses that have not been granted the Expanded Retail Discount, but detrimentally affected by the pandemic and the restrictions.

It is expected that the Government will be issuing guidance for Local Authorities shortly. Once received, the council will be able to review the guidance and design a discretionary scheme that best meets the needs of the borough.

Those businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors that received the Expanded Retail Discount have seen a reduction in the discount from 100% to 66% with effect from 1st July 2021. The rebilling of the businesses is complete and the Business Rates team is now monitoring customer reaction and payments closely.

Council tax

The recovery of unpaid Council Tax is well underway with significant numbers of notices being issued to customers. It is expected to be a very difficult year in respect of the collection of arrears. The approach by the Council Tax team will be to support customers where possible, but also ensuring that the recovery documents are issued promptly and collection is maximised.

Benefits

Following the end of the Brexit transition period, all EU, Swiss, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein nationals were given until 30th June 2021 to apply for the Government's European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS) to protect their rights on healthcare, education, pensions and welfare benefits.

Now that this period has ended, the Benefits team is waiting to be notified of those individuals/families who have not applied. All residents who fall into this category will have any Department of Work and Pensions welfare benefit and Council Tax Support entitlement cancelled. At present there is no indication on the number of cases this may affect.

In addition to the work undertaken by Home Office and Department of Work and Pensions to promote the scheme, support for residents locally has been led by Shelter, who partnered with Migration Help to assist EU nationals with the registration of the scheme. It is hoped that with this additional support, the number of non-registered cases in BwD will be relatively low.

Council: Delivered by a strong and resilient council

Financial Services

The team are now preparing year-end closure of the accounts and the final outturn 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 has been prepared, this will be reviewed and verified by Government against the authority's financial ledger.

Audit & Assurance

Progress in delivering the 2021/22 Annual Audit Plan was reported to the Audit & Governance Committee meeting on 29th June. The report summarised the internal audit outcomes achieved to the end of May, including 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 June Committee received the 2020/21 Head of Audit Annual Internal Audit Opinion, and the annual Risk Management and Counter Fraud Reports for consideration. The detail within these reports helps to inform the draft 2020/21 Annual Governance Statement, which the Committee also considered, to enable it to be satisfied that the Statement properly reflected the governance and control arrangements in place within the Council during 2020/21. It was then signed by the Leader and Chief Executive and will be included in the Council's 2020/21 Statement of Accounts.

The Committee also agreed its annual report at this meeting, which was prepared on its behalf by the Head of Audit & Assurance. This summarises the work undertaken and reports considered by the Committee during 2020/21, to demonstrate that it has fulfilled its agreed terms of reference effectively.

Corporate Procurement and Contracts

The Contracts and Procurement team have been working on the development of a new Social Value policy for Council procurement activity and are liaising with departments on various aspects of this.

The team has been involved in a variety of tenders and procurement exercises including for gully cleaning, highway resurfacing, school refurbishment works and a number of projects linked to the decarbonisation programme.

The team continues to support the provision of PPE to Council teams, suppliers and organisations in the borough to support the response to Covid 19.

HR Services Including Resilience & Emergency Planning

The Service has now established the project team to implement the new HR & Payroll system – MHR's iTrent, with a proposed Go live date of November 2021 for phase 1. This is a joint project supported by Digital & Business Change. Departments have been asked to minimise workforce changes from August 21 to November 21 to allow the HR & Payroll teams to complete user acceptance testing and parallel running and become upskilled to use the new system. A communications & training plan has been developed to ensure all users are fully aware of the new system and are able to fully utilise the functionality

The HR and Resilience & Emergency planning teams continue to provide support to the response to COVID, working with key leads across the Council to support the recovery. Additional capacity has been recruited to with the core team continuing to work with colleagues across the department and wider organisation to support the continued recovery. The implications of long Covid are a focus for the service.

There is an investment in leadership & management development with 2 programmes being commissioned with the North West Employers Organisation for Service leads and aspiring leaders. This will be further enhanced with leadership & management training at all levels across the organisation. Funding has also been secured from the LGA to undertake work with us on workforce planning.

Legal & Governance Services

The Governance team assisted in the successful delivery of the Blackburn with Darwen Council elections, town and Parish elections and the election for the Police and Crime Commissioner, which this year required additional organisation and planning to ensure the health & safety of all

concerned and to reflect the Covid-19 restrictions that were in place. The Governance team are now planning for the annual canvass and registration, which will commence soon.

Legal Services have been complimented for their hard work in putting in a large number of waste cases through the courts during a pandemic when the courts were not accepting as many cases. Up to the end of March, the legal team handled 49 waste prosecutions, despite a sustained period of suspension to court services due to the pandemic reminding anyone who continues to create problems for residents of the Borough can be advised that we will take action.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

COUNCILLOR PHIL RILEY

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR: MARTIN KELLY
DATE: 22 JULY 2021

PLACE, PRIORITY 4: CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

South East Blackburn - Growth Deal Major Transport Scheme

Works on the new Link Road and widening of Haslingden Road are progressing well and the contractor remains on programme with planned completion set for autumn 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 – Annual Improvements Programme

The 2021/22 LTP annual improvements programme was approved at Executive Board in June and includes road resurfacing and surface treatments, bridges and structures, road safety and improvements to traffic signals, drainage, street lighting and cycle routes.

Cycling and Walking Capability Funding

The service submitted a bid for 'Capability Funding' to the Department for Transport in April 2021 and a decision is imminent. The funding will enable the Council deliver several initiatives, to promote walking and cycling, working with both local schools and businesses. The funding will be used to support behaviour change activities including training, cycle loan schemes, travel planning, led events and the development of a local cycling and walking infrastructure plan.

Enhanced Bus Partnership

In June, the service announced its intention to develop an Enhanced Partnership working with local bus service providers and Lancashire County Council. To commence April 2022, the 'Enhanced Partnership' will ensure that the Council is compliant with recommendations of the National Bus Strategy and that we develop and publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan with private operators to deliver agreed service improvements.

PLACE, PRIORITY 5: SAFE & CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

Road Safety – School Travel Surveys

Highways are presently working with several primary and secondary schools to undertake school travel surveys. These surveys are undertaken in conjunction with the schools and assess both parents and pupils responses. The data received will enable appropriate journey planning and what interventions / initiatives are required to influence and change behaviour to promote public transport, walking and cycling.

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

The main contract for restoration and redevelopment works at Blakey Moor Terrace went out to tender at the beginning of June with a view to starting on site September/October for 12 months, subject to securing grant funding approval from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Grant funded works to neighbouring 29 Blakey Moor (former Jubilee Pub) are almost completed and the new business, Smoking Ranch n Grill, is aiming to be open in July/August.

Works to restore Council owned 14 and 20 Lord Street West are complete and Prism Gallery and Studios have reopened as a creative hub. Prism are joined in the building by Pennine Lancashire art commissioners Super Slow Way who have relocated from Burnley to Blackburn, and local design agency Source Creative.

Grant funded restoration works to bring derelict properties nos. 10 and 12 Lord Street West (former Mellors Wire Works) back into use are almost complete. So far the majority of the work has been internal, but the project has now started on the final phase of external works including restoring the original shop front at no. 12 and reinstating a new shopfront at no. 10 to create two separate retail units. This grant investment has helped bring forward £800,000 private sector investment on the former Campbells Amusements building and this will be ready to be marketed in August.

Funding has been agreed for phase II internal refurbishment at 35 Northgate (former Ribblesdale Hotel) and the main contractor is due to be appointed in the next few weeks.

The Townscape Heritage Project is now working with the private owners and businesses at 34 (Baileys Jewellers), 36-40 (Wellcome Poundshop), 27 (Poundcraze) and 13 (former Age Concern) Northgate to work up grant funded property improvement schemes to be delivered next year.

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

Growth Programme

The Growth Programme for 2021/22 was approved at Executive Board in April and is progressing as per the updates below.

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 approved in July. The development is expected to commence later this year and, combined with adjacent private land, will deliver a combined total of around 340 new family dwellings including 70 affordable houses plus contributions

towards more school places, roads and improving the Blacksnape Play Area.

- Keepmoat and Progress Housing have been selected to develop the Council's 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 planning application is expected later this year.
- Countryside Homes and Together Housing have now received full 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 take place over the summer to investigate the ground conditions. The landowners will commence with marketing the site later in the year.
- The Council granted full planning permission in July to McDermott Homes to build 30 new family homes off Lomond Gardens in Feniscowles. Construction is expected to commence by the Autumn.
- Elan Homes has been selected to purchase and develop the residential development parcels at Milking Lane, Lower Darwen, which the Council owns as part of the Barnfield Blackburn Ltd Joint Venture. A detailed 'reserved matters' planning application for 76 homes is expected over the summer.

Other developments of current or former Council land, at a more advanced stage, include the Roe Lee site, where Persimmon Homes are established on site; 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 Shorrocks Lane (former Laneside Care Home), Bowen Street and New Wellington Street. Applethwaite Homes have almost completed the new family homes at Tower Road, and Places for People are in the final stages of their development in Alaska Street, Infirmary Waterside. This includes the first adaptive homes built in the borough.

Commercial Developments

The Council completed the purchase of the former Thwaites Brewery site in May, 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 in 2020, and will open at the end of August.

At Carl Fogarty Way, preferred bidders have been selected for Plots 1 and 4, with legals progressing. Plot 6 is going through the tendering process with the remaining plots being offered to the market next year.

The new Blackburn Cinema and undercroft carpark is complete. Reel opened the cinema in May, when Covid restrictions allowed.

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 more responses than ever before for a Local Plan consultation.

The responses have been reviewed and were reported to Executive Board in July. Another consultation will take place in January 2022 before submitting the Plan to Government for examination.

Community Renewal Fund

As one of 100 priority places earmarked by Government for applications to the £220 million Community Renewal Fund, a £3 million bid was made in June after a quick turnaround of 3 months for calls for Expressions of Interest through to submission. Over 20 detailed bids were submitted to the Council, and following independent review against the Government's assessment criteria, 9 projects were prioritised based on their ability to deliver positive impacts across the Fund priorities of Employment, Skills, Place and Communities as well as supporting the Council's strategic priorities. The maximum bid of £3 million was submitted and we await the Government's response in the coming weeks, as all project spend and delivery must be committed and completed by the end of March 2022.

Darwen Town Deal

The Town Deal Board and Council are still to receive any formal feedback and an indication of a final funding allocation in support the Darwen Town Investment Plan, which was submitted to Government in January.

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

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: JAYNE IVORY
DATE: 27th July 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	272
Child Protection	181
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 by team managers 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.
- If Covid rules are finally relaxed on 19th July 2021, then the use of risk assessments will ease and the expectations will be business as usual in terms of face to face visits for all children. However, the use of social media and technology for some young people on a more ad hoc basis to 'stay in touch' and have meaningful communication will remain an additional option.
- We have recently – during June 2021 – participated in a peer review led by the LGA and the final report of their findings is due in three week's time. The theme was around our response to childhood neglect and the feedback of this piece of work has been shared with senior leaders in CSC and also including Denise Park, Mohammed Khan and Julie Gunn. The reviewers looked at 20 child care records at different levels within the service from early help to those becoming looked after. They also had privy to our most recent data and a total of 90 'quality' documents which demonstrated and gave examples of our culture, practice and vision. First impressions have been shared with us and are very favourable in that the peer reviewers saw examples of good practice right across the service. They could see an organisation where senior managers/leaders are in touch with the service, the staff and key partners and there was a clear golden thread of 'working with' and not 'doing to' at every level. They described a sense of energy within our organisation with the resilience of our staff during this pandemic being described as remarkable. It has been business as usual in spite of the pandemic which is a very positive message to share with our staff, our council and our key partners. There are some

recommendations to be take away to enhance our practice, and the full report will be available to us in three week's time which will provide the detail upon which we can further build upon.

- Work has been undertaken to further embed our Quality Assurance Framework through thematic audit activity and routine audit activity. During week commencing 17th May 2021 practice week was held with a focus on adolescence and the services we have in the borough to support young people. This was a positive week with learning circles, thematic audits, participation of young people, partnerships all contributing to the impact we have on achieving positive outcomes. The peer reviewers in June added to our positive findings by affirming that the offer to adolescents experiencing neglect received the support and services to meet their needs within our borough.
- Our Self Evaluation Framework now requires a refresh over the summer in preparation for a potential Ofsted inspection during the autumn of 2021. The context of Covid further needs to be set against the journey travelled in BwD within children's social care. This includes aspects such as manageable caseloads and the resilience and dedication reflected both by ourselves and affirmed by the peer reviewers during their time spent in our organisation.

What our data tells us

Early Help

There has been an increase in the number of CAFS which at the end of May was 719.

The increase has predominantly been for children aged 0-4 and 5-10 years.

We have seen a slight increase of CAFS from the 0-19 universal service who now hold 85 CAFS.

The roll out of e-CAF- a small number of lead professionals from across health and education have now completed the relevant training and signing of information governance agreements, but have yet to go live on the system.

CADS

Weekly Average Data	May 2020 (626)	May 2021 (1,223)	+ / -
Number of contacts into CADS	157	306	+95%
Number of children progressing to CSC	25	42	+17
Conversion rate – contact to referral	15%	14%	-1%

This data demonstrates how the model into CADS is working in terms of the increased number of contacts into children's social care, but then the numbers progressing to referral have remained steady. However, the reasons for contacting CADS increasing by 95% is particularly high and is likely linked to the relaxing of lockdown and more professionals having sight of children and wishing to share concerns/seek advice.

The offer of the early help advice line is being broadcast further to ensure that the contacts into CADS could not be explored at a lower level.

The weekly CADS data meetings address timeliness of outcomes; the sources of the referrals; the number received via telephone/email; particular cases on a thematic basis for example - sibling groups; HV referrals; unborns; homeless young people; all strategy discussions. These meetings are now extended to 1.5 hours as opposed to one hour per week.

RAST

91% of single assessments are completed within timescales and the average caseloads in RAST are 18 currently. This workload level is supporting the timeliness of assessments and the quality of such assessments. It is felt that this reduction in workload is then one reason for our child protection figures decreasing as a quality CIN plan is supporting the child and family more effectively – less firefighting and more proactive meaningful practice.

AST

The average caseloads in AST are currently 19. Again, this workload level leads us to expect high quality intervention and support which detracts from cases escalating and if they do need to escalate, the quality of analysis and evidence should be high.

The above matter of caseload capacity was raised in our recent Ofsted catch up with Sarah Urding where the direction of travel remains positive.

Despite the impact of Covid, the number of ICO's has gradually decreased since the implementation of the legal gateway panel – now at 53 – so I believe the ability for SW to be more effective, creative and to be supportive systemically is having an impact on how we intervene is working. The confidence of the team managers and the support from their service leads is steering the workforce to having different conversations – working with families and not doing to. Relationships are sound with our legal department and any issues are tackled effectively.

In summary less children are open within children's social care safeguarding teams and less children are entering care – there is a drive to ensure the right children sit within the service at the right level and for the right length of time. Open cases in RAST/AST in early June 2020 were 821 and in early June 2021 they are 723.

However, I would add that the complexity of cases and the demands in terms of intensive support from partners and our support teams does challenge staff time and capacity and the service leads are offering flexibility and support to the team managers to manage this.

The summer will be a test for us in terms of the further impact of Covid and the focus being on Lancashire upsurges in the Delta Variant and for BwD in particular. Staff morale fluctuates and it does feel relentless at times for our workforce in terms of understanding government guidelines and ensuring a service is offered. However their resilience and keenness to perform has been sustained despite this situation.

ADOLESCENT SERVICES

SEEDS – Adolescent Support Unit

The SEEDS service has been successful in its reassessment for the Investors in Children's award. The award recognises young people's involvement in the design and delivery of services. Feedback from young people interviewed highlighted the excellent work of the edge of care service and demonstrated the value of the service to young people and families. Young people's direct comments were extremely positive and the department is extremely proud of its offer, which is recognised as good practice by other councils who often visit or engage with the service for advice and support to establish similar provisions in other local authorities.

Participation

The newly merged participation and youth voice offer has all its CIOC and leaving care forums up and running and are working with young people to create a bespoke space at Kaleidoscope Youth Centre. A new co-produced Participation Strategy is being finalised, after a series of planned consultations with young people, professionals and partners.

The BwD Youth Forum have co-produced a Well-being Champions course with support from a Mental Health Professional Trainer, The course for young people will enable them to better support their peers in schools, colleges and youth organisations. Twelve young people from across the borough will take part in the training courses in August. This course has been sourced and developed due to the Youth MP's highlighting the impact of Covid on children and young people's mental health at a recent Children's Partnership Board meeting.

SEND Inclusion

Young people from the Kids Next Door ASD group have recently participated in national consultation regarding the impact of Covid on children and young people with SEND, the findings have been published in a report by the department of education.

The SEND Inclusion project is now full for Summer Scheme and HAF places due to popularity and demand. Children and Young People are RAG rated with colleagues to ensure the most vulnerable families are supported.

Children and young people will have the opportunity to participate in a wide range of activities such as sensory play, arts and crafts, outdoor activities such as canoeing, sailing, climbing, bushcraft and mountain biking and get a nutritious daily meal during the HAF programme. The SEND HAF summer programme will run over 6 days including weekends.

Targeted Youth Support

Plans have been finalised for the TYS HAF programme. Children and Young People will benefit from a minimum of 4 hours activity a day, for 4 days a week, for the 4 weeks of August. The activity plans include, Outdoor Education, Watersports, Music, Drama as well as trips and visits around the local area. All whilst remaining Covid Secure and enjoying a daily nutritious meal and door to door pickups/drop offs.

Positive Activity Team

As well as contributing fully to all the plans listed above; the Positive Activity Team has restarted its Duke of Edinburgh expedition programmes and has begun taking commissioned work from local schools again. The latest industry (National Youth Agency) regulations now allow a much wider range of activity including large outdoor groups and overnight/residential stays and YPS is busy planning Covid secure activity over the coming months.

EDUCATION

Our Education response team have continued to support our school and settings over this academic year. The relationship with our schools and settings has been excellent with schools and settings following track and trace advice for confirmed cases. The Education response team have held Outbreak management meetings with school that have been identified as a trigger for the number of cases. We are confident our schools and settings have remained COVID secure throughout the academic year – leaders within settings have ensured this is the highest priority. All school have taken part in Surge testing whilst Blackburn with Darwen has been in an Enhanced area of support. This has involved:

Primary schools – when a case has been identified with the agreement of parents / carers children within the bubble have received a PCR for themselves and all members of the household.

High schools – All Staff and Pupils (with agreement of parents) have taken part in PCR testing either at home or onsite.

Overall this has been a resounding success, and in no small measure has helped the Borough identify new cases and reduce the spread of the virus. Inevitably this has resulted in more identified cases and more pupils isolating as a result. Schools have worked hard to ensure online and remote learning has been stepped up in these cases.

We await further DfE guidance regarding the Autumn term. However the following advice has been given to schools:

Regular testing will pause in education settings over the summer except for in those that remain open such as summer schools, out of school settings and those that do not operate on a term-time basis. In these cases, only those attending should continue to test regularly.

The guidance for children in year 6 and below remains the same and we will not be advising them to test. This includes year 6 pupils attending transition days or summer schools over the summer break.

We want to help education settings to be prepared for all scenarios, including testing on return after the summer holidays. We will provide all schools and colleges with refreshed guidance, test kits, and PPE so that you can be ready to stand up on-site Asymptomatic Test Sites (ATS) from the start of the autumn term. We expect to be able to confirm the position alongside announcements on Step 4. Given the uncertainties about the Covid situation we will face in the autumn, we want to help secondary schools and colleges to be as prepared as possible for all scenarios, including testing on return after the summer holidays, if needed. Schools and colleges may choose to start testing students and pupils no earlier than three days before the start of term, or stagger the return of pupils during the first week of term if they would like to do so. This is voluntary and at the discretion of each school and college.

As of 10th June for this academic year, total missed days reported by schools to the DfE:

Confirmed Covid	9,214
Suspected Covid	15,667
Contact in school	130,141
Contact outside of school	54,826

Key priorities:

- Continue to ensure our schools and settings are provided the necessary support following latest DfE COVID guidance
- Support and encourage our young people to take part in regular testing over the summer period
- Provide the support necessary for our schools to be 'OFSTED' ready following updates to the Inspection handbook
- Ensure the Education recovery plan is embedded in schools and setting ensure the best outcomes for our children and young people.
- Continue to ensure safeguarding has the highest priority for all schools and settings – Each school and setting are currently completing a Section 175 audit. Section 175 of the 2002 Education Act requires local education authorities and the governing bodies of maintained schools and FE colleges to make arrangements to ensure that their functions are carried out with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. Section 157 of the 2002 Education Act and the Independent School Regulations 2003 convey the same responsibilities on all other non-maintained settings.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

COUNCILLOR JIM SMITH

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: MARTIN EDEN
DATE: 22 JULY 2021**

WASTE AND RECYCLING

The Council will be delivering its next round of annual calendars to all households in the borough towards the end of July, with dates for the collection of waste and recycling bins. The calendars will also provide details of what can and cannot go in which bin. At the same time as delivering the calendar, the Council has been working with the Keep Britain Tidy Group and will deliver a leaflet detailing their efforts to reduce plastic pollution getting into rivers and our seas.

We are also working on developing a recycling partnership with Terracycle, who have a reception facility at the Suez depot in Darwen, to accept and recycle plastic film at our Household Waste Recycling Centres. At present, we are unable to recycle it within the borough, but should soon have an outlet available for residents.

The garden/brown bin subscription scheme is going from strength to strength, the total number of subscriptions by the end of May 2020 was 13,834, and the total number of subscriptions by the end of May 2021 is 14,542.

The Council's Envirocrime enforcement team, along with its Legal Services team, successfully prosecuted 16 residents for various waste offences in May this year, as part of our efforts to tackle those who blight our communities, due to their poor waste management. In addition to this, the Council has also recruited an additional enforcement officer to respond to the challenges in the areas of the most prolific poor waste management, caused by owners, tenants and also landlords. The officer is already dealing with a number of cases that may ultimately end up in court, if the residents and any respective landlords do not take heed of the advice being provided.

Additional signage is also being placed around the ponds and lakes at Corporation Park to deter residents from leaving food for the wildlife in the area, as it causing continual problems with rodents eating the food left by residents with the best of intentions. The Council continually has to bait the locations to control the rodent population, but is fighting a constant battle due to the amount of food being left for birds and other wildlife.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The Environment team are developing a range of educational resources, not just aimed at households, but more specifically, for schools and community groups to use to educate young people, to encourage good habits of not dropping litter and also correctly recycling – this is also a good way of introducing these messages to their families as well.

A new web site has been created to host these materials www.recyclebwd.org Resources are being added to all the time, and also include some cartoon characters to help engage young people, which are outlined below:-

Captain Muck and Captain Litter Campaign

As part of our mission to reduce littering across Blackburn with Darwen, we are working with local schools and teachers to educate young people on the negative impacts of dropping litter. We have developed ‘litter heroes’ – Captain Muck & Captain Litter – who help us with this mission.

Organising a litter patrol is a great way for the school to show their pupils that they want to look after their local environment and how important it is, whilst actively encouraging people not to drop litter and take pride in where they live.

Blackburn with Darwen Council, alongside Captain Muck and Captain Litter, can help schools with their litter patrol by lending them the necessary litter picking equipment. This includes litter pickers, bags, gloves, stickers and certificates. We also have a resource booklet with links to the curriculum, how to organise a litter pick and how to evaluate the results afterwards.

So far since launching in May 2021, our litter heroes’ equipment has been lent out to 5 schools. Schools can find out more and register their interest here: [Litter Patrol – BwD Recycle \(recyclebwd.org\)](http://www.recyclebwd.org)

Recycling superheroes

We have also created an educational website aimed at primary school children that covers all aspects of waste, with a local focus.

Each recycling superhero is linked with one of our four bins – general waste, recycling, paper and cardboard and garden waste. As well as useful videos, we have an online colouring page, quiz, and an interactive word search. Meet the heroes here: <https://recyclebwd.org/meet-the-heroes/>

PARKING SERVICES

Benefits of Parking Enforcement during the lockdown

Parking management is an important public service, which provides benefits to motorists and the wider community. Those benefits include maintaining road safety and ensuring access to goods and services. This is extremely important, particularly for certain key workers, as local authorities aim to keep providing essential services at this challenging time.

New undercroft car park and Feilden Street car park upgrades

On the 15th March 2021 the new undercroft car park opened below the cinema, this is a free car park for users of the new Reel cinema but also doubles up as a Pay and Display car park for other users of the Town Centre.

The car park has an Automatic Number Plate system (ANPR) which has also been installed in Feilden St MSCP. These car parks operating hours have been increased and now open until midnight 7 days a week.

New enforcement powers

From December 2021 the powers to enforce moving traffic offences is being extended to local authorities. Moving traffic offences such as banned turns, stopping in boxed junctions and driving in formal cycle lanes will all be the Council's responsibility to enforce. It is expected that these powers will allow improved connectivity, boost active travel and increase air quality by reducing congestion.

PUBLIC PROTECTION & ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

The Service has continued to focus heavily on Covid-secure enforcement, working to prepare businesses for the easing of restrictions on 12th April and 17th May and checking that they continue to operate safely.

Prior to each key date, officers engaged with key businesses to ensure that they understood their responsibilities and that their covid-19 risk assessments were realistic and comprehensive. Following each easing, officers have carried out numerous visits to confirm compliance, provide advice and, where absolutely necessary, take enforcement action.

With the identification of the Delta variant, officers supported enhanced test and trace work with more in depth doorstep visits with people who had tested positive to try to identify the extent of community transmission. As the Delta variant took hold, work intensified to ensure that businesses in the Borough remained as safe as they could be.

Covid Marshals have continued to patrol streets and shopping centres to promote mask wearing among the public where appropriate.

In the period April – June 21, the Service:

- Carried out 1889 compliance visits
- Dealt with 104 complaints
- Handled 14 requests for advice
- Carried out 504 doorstep visits to support test and trace
- Advised 37 businesses following outbreaks
- Issued 5 FPN's and 22 warning notices

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH & WELLBEING

COUNCILLOR DAMIAN TALBOT

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTORS: DOMINIC HARRISON &
MARTIN EDEN
DATE: 22 July 2021

PEOPLE: A good quality of life for all our residents

Public Health

Blackburn with Darwen 5 Ways to Wellbeing Campaign: The campaign was designed to encourage residents to take up something new, or do more of something they already do, because it feels good and it has a positive effect on your mood. We wanted to encourage residents, to explore all the opportunities in our borough that can positive impact our wellbeing. The 5 Ways to Wellbeing is a proven, simple set of actions that anyone can take to positively impact their day-to-day wellbeing under 5 headings: Take Notice, Keep Learning, Be Active, Help Others and Connect. The campaign:

- Saw 18 staff members or volunteers from 10 partner organisations undertake the Connect 5 Awareness Training Course. (the official training course of the 5 Ways.)
- Funded 10 wellbeing sessions. For example, a **Take Notice** of your Taste Buds session at Blackburn Foodbank and a **Connect** over Campfire and Conversations session Blackburn Canalside Activity Centre.
- Put together a programme of over 185 activities from 22 different partners in the borough. Activities included everything from mindfulness, meditation, arts and crafts, first aid, stress busting, dementia awareness, training, reading support and walking to community history, IT, cycling, parks and open spaces, toddler trails, coping with change, sports and much more.
- Developed localised 5 Ways to Wellbeing resources which can continued to be used by the council and partners. These included our logo, the webpage (<https://www.blackburn.gov.uk/5wwb>) the 5 animations to help explain the 5 Ways to Wellbeing and our hashtag **#5waysbwd**.
- Was also delivered across social media and it reached over 40,000 people across Facebook and Twitter, with over a thousand positive engagements and interactions across both channels.

Post campaign the Council's attention is now switched to embedding the 5 Ways to Wellbeing through all our health and wellbeing messages.

The Public Health Team are funding a Train the Trainer project for the Connect 5 training course. Which will train 16 staff members or volunteers from partner organisations to be deliverers of the training course, furthering that reach into our communities.

Healthy Weight in Early Years Programme (HealthyWEY): Blackburn with Darwen Council and Liverpool John Moores University have secured £105k from Public Health England to develop the HealthyWEY e-learning toolkit kit for maternity and early years workforces. This builds on the extensive research programme undertaken by Dr Daisy Bradbury and supported by the Council's Children's Services and Public Health teams to develop a toolkit to support front line workers have conversations about healthy weight with families of children aged 2-4. This funding will enable this toolkit originally developed in BwD to be tested in 8 local authorities nationally with the aim for it to be sited on the national 'All Our Health'. This award recognises the pioneering work done in BwD, in partnership with Liverpool John Moores, in promoting healthy weight in Early Years and will give national recognition to both organisations for the work in this field.

Additional Substance Misuse Funding: Blackburn with Darwen has been awarded £448,000 from Public Health England to support work on drug related crime reduction and drug related deaths. The funding is only for 2021-22 and was granted for specific interventions as prescribed by PHE.

The additional funding will increase treatment options and capacity, improve care pathways and enhance recovery support post prison release. It will also increase treatment and support via family work and increased diversionary activities via work with CGL, THOMAS, Active Lancashire, CrossFit 180 and Probation.

Leisure Services

Leisure Services has continued to operate in a reduced capacity, Covid secure way across all indoor and outdoor facilities. These limits have meant fewer people being able to attend almost every activity due to control measures and social distancing; however, customer feedback from those participating remains consistently positive about their experiences. Leisure Services is liaising closely with national governing bodies regarding Step 4 of the roadmap to ensure full adherence to any national guidance and looks forward to welcoming more people back into our leisure facilities

Venues

Officially opened in October 1921, King George's Hall will be celebrating its centenary later in the year. During the week of the anniversary itself a range of celebration events are being planned, including a performance by The Halle who gave the opening concert in October 1921. The oral history project, *Walls have Ears*, is well underway and will form the basis of a physical exhibition at King George's Hall during Heritage Open week.

Throughout June we have delivered a number of socially distanced performances at Darwen Library Theatre to test the functionality of the new ticketing system. Audiences attending these shows have shared nothing but praise for our operational processes helping to keep them informed and safe.

As theatres and venues look forward to full re-opening, the autumn season is packed with TV appearance comedians such as Jimmy Carr, Suzi Ruffell and Jason Manford along with concerts by The South, Alexander O'Neal and Boyslife. There is also an array of family friendly options including Fireman Sam and Stick Man before our first pantomime with the new company, Shone Productions, who will be bringing Snow White to KGH.

Libraries

All our libraries are now open and with the help of our wonderful volunteers we are working hard to return to our full range of opening hours, but as distancing guidance remains in place, we also offer group event access outside of our current opening times to spread onsite attendance. Aligning with the phased lifting of restrictions and Covid safety measures, we have reintroduced the provision of much needed study spaces and increased onsite access to digital resources. We continue to support those who are less confident mixing with others with provision of our Call and Collect Service.

E-Magazine offer increased - facilitated by participation in the Greater Manchester Library Consortium, we have significantly increased the range and number of e-magazine titles from 274 to 2,700. Library membership provides access to this free resource, which enables users young and old to read their favourite magazine from their computer, tablet or smartphone.

Wild World Heroes, this year's Summer Reading Challenge for children aged 4 to 12 years launched on 1st July and will run until the end of September. Children can read any 6 books from our hard copy or digital selections and as they progress they will collect prizes for each one they finish. Staff have been busy promoting the challenge with schools across the Borough via in person visits and virtual meetings. The challenge forms just one part of our wider summer activity programme which is currently being finalised.

Arts & Heritage

Tokaido Road: Our next exhibition features The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido Road, the complete Hoeido series of woodblock prints by the renowned Japanese Ukiyo-e artist Utagawa Hiroshige. The landscapes show glimpses of everyday life in 19th century Japan just before it opened up to Western trade in the 1850s.

Hiroshige first travelled the Tokaido Road in 1832 as part of an official procession, during which he sketched scenes of local people and travellers in various landscapes and seasons along the journey. His work has influenced artists such as Van Gogh and Monet and continues to inspire today. The exhibition runs from 23 July – 18 September 2021.

Homegrown Homespun: Blackburn is working to be the first town in modern times to grow its own clothes, with its very own field of flax and woad by Jan's conference centre, Higher Audley Street, BB1 1DH. Homegrown Homespun is a collaboration with designer Patrick Grant, his social enterprise Community Clothing, The Super Slow Way and North West England Fibreshed.

There are volunteers helping to farm the flax and woad on Fridays below all are welcome

Friday 6th Aug – Pulling flax 10 – 12 (drop in)

Friday 13th Aug – Retting flax 10 – 12 (drop in)

Friday 20th Aug – Retting flax 10 – 12 (drop in)

Friday 27th August Retting flax 10 – 12 (drop in)

Friday 3rd September – Retting flax 10 – 12 (drop in)

If you would like to join or find out more information email Uzma: uzma@superslowway.org.uk and join the whatsapp group here to get regular updates on activities and events.

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

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

DATE: 22 July 2021

ALBION MILL

We are pleased to now be close to opening this fantastic new development in Blackburn, predicted July/August and recruitment of staff has really picked up pace. Final preparations are taking place to ensure a vibrant and busy community atmosphere within Community Hub. The teams are working through referrals to support Independent living and opportunities for individuals to lead a fuller life with the new housing with care scheme, also known as extra care housing.

In addition, the Intermediate Care facility is being inspected by Care Quality Commission for registration approval which will provide high quality, person-centred, short-term therapy led provision to residents from their own home as 'step up' and to those being discharged from hospital as 'step down'.

The scheme has formed partnerships across Blackburn with Darwen Council, the Clinical Commissioning Group, Inclusion Housing Lancashire and South Cumbria Foundation Trust, Local Primary Care GP Federation and Willowbrook Homecare.

Albion Mill is designed with a community hub to provide community activities for residents and the wider community. The Concierge Service will run these activities with the support of the brand new Friends of Albion Mill voluntary group, which already has 30 volunteers and has been successful with a £10,000 lottery bid for equipment. Activities will include learning, exercise, social events, crafts, hobbies and information and advice from groups like BwD Age UK and the Care Network. The Concierge Service will run 12 hours a day 365 days a year and will support partners to ensure the Mill is well run and remains spick and span, including daily checks on cleanliness, health and safety and security. For further details, please visit the Concierge Service's Social Media platforms:

Facebook: [AlbionMillCommunityHub](#)

Twitter: [AlbionMillCH](#)

Instagram: [AlbionMillCH](#)

Aerial video: <https://vimeo.com/534898651>

In the run up to opening, work has been undertaken to process and review applications, coordinate care assessments with our care provider Willowbrook Homecare, and allocate suitable apartments. Letters of acceptance to the scheme have now been sent to individuals and approval panel continues to process new applications. We are all very proud of the accommodation and the support that will be provided at Albion Mill and are looking forward to helping individuals move into their homes.

HOSPITAL PRESSURES

Blackburn Royal has been under significant pressure, particularly with a return to routine treatment coinciding with the recent surge in infections due to the Covid Delta Variant. The Hospital has also seen higher numbers of people attend Accident and Emergency, greater than the peak period in winter.

We have therefore been working in Partnership on an approach called the 'Perfect Week' to optimise good practice and help reduce pressure on hospital beds. This means more discharges and greater demand on the council's social care teams.

This has also coincided with outbreaks in care homes and domiciliary care. The council has had to respond on all front and it has been an extremely demanding period.

The good news has been that we have seen a reduction in numbers going into intensive care and lower numbers of people dying,

Therefore whilst we move towards an easing of lockdown restrictions on the 19th July 2021, we feel our most vulnerable and the service providers need to continue to maintain high levels of precaution and infection, prevention and control.

STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING & FINANCE

Demands on the Care Sector and the Councils Covid response has increased again with the latest spike in Covid cases within the borough and the increase in cases due to the variant of concern. The Care Sector Response Group continue to meet regularly to provide this response and regular situation reports. We continue to monitor the uptake of vaccinations for both care home residents and staff however despite good level of vaccination a number of our homes have had to manage significant outbreaks and required the support of our in house crisis teams.

Local advice to care homes in the last few weeks has been to restrict visiting to outdoors/pods and not to increase visiting to the numbers proposed in National Guidance. Homes have been advised to facilitate visiting as far as possible based on their own risk assessment but the impact of local advice has been of concern to family and friends who have been unable to visit relatives as they intended. We continue to promote a safe and compassionate approach to visiting and ask registered providers to consider all circumstances and support appropriately.

Covid 19 has had a very significant impact on many of our providers with some struggling to return to previous occupancy levels which is reducing their ability to be financially sustainable. The Commissioning and Finance team continue to support and work closely with all providers across the sector. It would be fair to say that there is increasing concern for the sector the longer Covid-19 goes on. Poses risk of future viability.

The team are recruiting additional temporary resources to provide a dedicated team who will work closely with providers, and alongside the departments operational teams, to support the sectors recovery from Covid 19. The team will be reviewing quality and CQC inspection ratings to support improvements in care provision across the sector and we will continue to work closely with our colleagues within Lancashire and South Cumbria system .

The Daily welfare calls are also reducing as we move to a more sustainable capacity tracker model. Providers are moving to self-input within the national system (NECS) which will enable providers to have more control over this work

The Government have announced a further round of Infection Control Fund (IPC) and Rapid Testing Grant to run from July through to end of September. We await further details of the grant allocations and conditions but anticipate that grant conditions will require detailed usage returns to DHSC to comply with Government requirements.

COVID COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

Following a recruitment campaign, we now have a network of 265 Community Champions in Blackburn with Darwen who are;

- Helping us to share key messages regularly
- Giving us feedback and insight to inform future communications
- Attending network meetings with local experts, helping us to set key messages for engagement and discussing local issues

Community Champions are a diverse group of people who live and work in Blackburn with Darwen. They are local residents, public sector staff and representatives of voluntary community and faith sector organisations.

We also have three commissioned pieces of work targeting engagement with groups who are particularly vulnerable to the impact of covid;

- Care Network are leading a consortium of providers engaging with adults with learning difficulties and disabilities and autism
- The Strategic Youth Alliance are engaging with young people
- Spring North are leading a consortium of providers engaging with BAME communities

The Covid Community Champions work has already influenced;

- Clearer messaging around the difference between an LFD and a PCR test
- Proposals for a LAMP testing pilot
- Transport solutions for accessing vaccination appointments
- Translated information

You can find out more about Covid Community Champions, and register as a Champion here; <https://www.blackburn.gov.uk/coronavirus/covid-community-champions>

SUPPORTING FAMILIES PROGRAMME

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) Troubled Families Programme was renamed to Supporting Families in April 2021 – this is a welcome change for our strength-based approach for empowering families locally. Blackburn with Darwen (BwD) successfully achieved the programme targets for 2020/21 and the emphasis and focus for this year's programme is on data integration for the Council and with local and regional partners. The BwD programme is now closely aligned with Early Help and Digital Services to enable the commitments for the programme to be met. MHCLG are currently consulting on further improvements to the programme, signalling continuation beyond March 2022.

Lancashire Volunteer Partnership (LVP) VOLUNTEER'S CELEBRATION

As part of Volunteers Week, the Leader of the Council, Mohammed Khan CBE and Mayor of Blackburn with Darwen, Councillor Derek Hardman joined Strategic Director for Adult's and Health, Sayyed Osman to extend thanks to volunteers on behalf of the Council. Volunteers supporting a wide-range of Council services joined a virtual celebration event on Monday 7th June. The volunteers also shared their stories via video which were later shared on the large screen outside the Town Hall and the Council's social media channels. More information: <https://theshuttle.org.uk/council-leaders-host-celebration-to-thank-boroughs-incredible-volunteers/>

MORE POSITIVE TOGETHER: EMPLOYABILITY SUPPORT

More Positive Together (MPT) is a Lancashire wide project aiming to support people furthest from employment to help improve their skills and employment prospects through mentoring. The project funded by European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), and has enabled us to provide one-to-one support and engage people who are looking to develop themselves. For more information please visit: www.blackburn.gov.uk/mpt. The project is due to end in December 2021 and a bid has been submitted to extend the project up to December 2023.

Additional ESIF funding has been secured, the MPT STEPS project will commence in January 2022 to support residents who have become unemployed due to Covid.

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.

The Mental Health Service, in particular, is under significant increased demand and therefore, the implementation of a remodel of the mental Health Support Service in the Community Mental Health Team, over the past 9 months, has been timely.

We are now seeing more complexity in the cases that arise. At a system level

CCTV UPDATE

The CCTV control room is in the process of upgrading its software, which will allow the expansion of the existing network. Aside from increasing capacity, set against high demand from local authority and public service partners for further cameras, it will also allow the full use of 4 way high definition cameras. This provides a permanently recorded 360 degree view, improve the detection of crime as each camera location can see in all directions at all times.

The upgrade also includes wider systems supporting the safety and security of staff, and public spaces to include lone worker and staff welfare systems, panic buttons in meeting rooms, reception desks and remote pendants that link to the control room.

Other opportunities of the system will be the potential to integrate with the highways cameras as well as monitoring pollution and traffic congestion changing traffic light sequences and implementing diversion routes via electronic signage. It will also be possible to monitor intruder, fire alarm, building management and access control systems.

Alongside the system upgrade there is now a dedicated police officer based in the control room on a full-time basis. Aside from support in ongoing incidents, the officer will support investigations, continually reviewing CCTV footage and securing the best evidence at the first opportunity, with the aim of further increasing the number of detections.

COMMUNITY SAFETY – ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR TEAM

Over the last 12 months, the council's Anti-social behaviour team have been working with the police and partners to address a significant increase in reported neighbourhood complaints, principally due to reporting of breaches in Covid regulations. In the first quarter of 2021, we have had consecutive monthly reductions on such breaches as the government began lifting restrictions. While Covid related concerns have reduced however, wider concerns around Anti-Social Behaviour have risen at their fastest rate since 2010, with several parts of the borough raising specific and repeated concerns with drug use and paraphernalia and the anti-social use of vehicles. The team are working with the police and partners on both prevention measures and also intervention and enforcement in response, prioritising those areas of greater concern.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR DIGITAL AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

COUNCILLOR QUESIR MAHMOOD

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICER: PAUL FLEMING
22 July 2021

People: A good quality of life for all our residents

Customer services

The automated web assistant was launched in June to respond to customers who request basic information or need signposting to the correct web page. Based on early data, 69% of the web assistant requests were dealt with in an automated manner. This new way of working is allowing us to better allocate Customer Service officers to deal with any incoming telephone calls.

Whilst it is still very early days, the customer feedback has also been extremely positive. We will continue to monitor the usage and comments as we seek to improve the web assistant product over the next few months.

Registrars

Over the past few months the Registrars service has been able to reduce the resources needed to support death registrations and reallocate them to wedding ceremonies. Following the restrictions of the last 15 months, many weddings and other ceremonies have either been postponed or cancelled. The team are continuing to support customers in the rebooking of ceremonies and field the many new requests coming through.

Digital Customer Experience

Newly designed forms and services continue to be delivered for customers through the online Digital Customer Portal platform. Recent additions include Covid Champions and reporting of faulty street lights. The work on these digital forms, also includes the redesign of associated web pages on Blackburn.Gov.UK. This is the holistic approach that the team are taking when designing new digital services; ensuring that services are easy to find and use, supported by clearly written and easy to understand content. Since its inception in April 2020, the customer portal has received over 110,000 service requests and has over 55,000 registered users.

As part of our aim to include customers in the redesign of services, we continue to engage with the customer panel who have signed up to provide feedback on our services. We have also started undertaking more detailed user research with targeted groups, for the first time since the pandemic began. The first groups were Keep Blackburn Tidy and Keep Darwen Tidy. The team are using these sessions to understand the life of a volunteer and what “good” would look like to them. We wish to embrace groups like this to build our services for the better with users at the centre of everything we do. This insight will be used to further develop services and starts the formation of long term relationships with citizens in service design.

Council Website Blackburn.Gov.UK

At the start of June we released an updated homepage for the Council’s website. The update was informed by user research, data on how the site is being used and a commissioned audit on the accessibility. The new design has been optimised for people using web browser adaptations for visual impairment, as an example. The team will continue to improve the site through iterations based on research and feedback.

Council: Delivered by a strong and resilient council

Resilience & Emergency Planning Service

The Resilience & Emergency Planning Service has been working in response to the Covid-19 crisis since March 2020 alongside its Lancashire, regional and national partners in support of the Council and to effect a valuable response for its Community and employees; this is achieved through working with the Core Covid Team and Work Stream Leads that support the Chief Executive and Directors.

Whilst BwD has been in this response mode we have also responded to gas leaks in the town centre, chemical and large fuel spills, multiple housing fires and rest centre set up, an electricity sub-station explosion at King Georges Hall and multiple Operation Merlin's (dynamic response to unknown substance eg. gas canisters / chemical leak).

We have reviewed the Business Continuity plans in order to progress the Business Continuity audit process. We have also reviewed "functional emergency plans" to ensure their currency and validity, assisting Blackburn with Darwen Borough council to prepare for any additional incidents during the prolonged ongoing response to Covid19.

We have worked with 6 out of the 7 local school improvement groups to deliver a consistent training package and approach to Emergency Response. This provides a consistent structure for the schools to plan for emergencies. We have also recently delivered two planning exercise sessions to the Community, Academy, Free and Independent schools.

Duty Officer Statistics - Full year 2020/2021

Info received	159
Warning total	792
Total:	951
Strategic Officer Activations	6
Duty Officer Activations	69

Digital Strategy

Since approval of the strategy in April, the team have been developing a number of business cases to support further investment in improved technology. The first of which is to propose an upgrade to the council's legacy telephony infrastructure and enhance the existing Microsoft 365 licences which staff use. Both of which will introduce new tools, functionality and enhanced cyber security.

Technology Support and remote working

With large groups of staff still working from home, the team continue to promote new tools to support remote and hybrid working. The next phase will see a number of meeting rooms equipped with Microsoft Teams video conferencing devices. An initial pilot has proved successful and this will be expanded to test the technology with partner agencies. The new technology will enable some meeting attendees to be present in the room whilst others join remotely.

The IT Team continue to support officers and members with their IT equipment and systems. The team also provided specialist IT support throughout the 2021 elections process, working closely with the Elections Team.

Business Intelligence

The Business Intelligence team are making good progress in developing automated reporting from the Council's digital customer portal. This will enable services to monitor performance and

customer demand in near real time. The team are now starting to work on developing a similar suite of reports for Children's Social Care.

Public Sector Transformation Award

The Digital team have recently been recognised as one of three finalists for the national IESE Public Sector Transformation awards, in the Digital category. Final placings will be announced at a ceremony later this year. The team's entry was based on the Council's digital response to the pandemic.