

# Public Document Pack

## Council Forum

Thursday, 24th March, 2022

6.00 pm

Council Chamber, Blackburn Town Hall

[Link to Webcast](#)

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### AGENDA

1. **Welcome and Apologies**
2. **Prayers by the Mayor's Chaplain**
3. **Minutes Of The Previous Meeting**  
**FINANCE COUNCIL 2022** **3 - 12**
4. **Declarations of Interest**  
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5. **Mayoral Communications**
6. **Council Forum**  
To consider any questions from members of the public under Procedure Rule 12.
7. **Motions**  
To consider any Motions submitted under Procedure Rule 10.
8. **Pennine Lancashire Building Control Joint Committee - Withdrawal from Joint Agreement**  
**Council Forum Report - PLBC Withdrawal March 2022** **14 - 17**
9. **Procurement Strategy and Social Value Policy**  
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10. **Update from Overview and Scrutiny Committees**  
**Overview and Scrutiny** **20 - 23**
11. **Reports of the Executive Members with Portfolios**

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	<b>Environmental Services</b>	<b>28 - 29</b>
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<b>12.</b>	<b>Questions from Members</b>	
	To consider any questions received from members under Procedure Rule 11.	

Date Published: Wednesday, 16 March 2022  
Denise Park, Chief Executive

## **FINANCE COUNCIL** **Monday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022**

**PRESENT** – *The Mayor Councillor Derek Hardman, Councillors , Akhtar H, Akhtar P, Baldwin, Bateson, Browne, Casey, Desai M, Desai S, Fazal, Fielding, Floyd, Gee, Gunn, Humphrys, Hussain M, , Jan-Virmani,, Khan M, Khan Z, Khonat, Liddle, Mahmood, Marrow, McFall, McGurk, Oates, Patel A, Patel Alt, Rawat, Rigby J, Riley, Russell, Salton, Sidat, Shorrocks, Slater Ja, Slater Jo, Slater Ju, Slater N, Smith D, Smith J, Talbot, Taylor and Whittle.*

### **RESOLUTIONS**

#### **53 Welcome and Apologies**

The Chief Executive read out the notice convening the meeting.

Apologies were received from Councillors Brookfield, Connor, Harling, Hussain I, Hussain S, Irfan, and Walker.

After Prayers by the Mayor's Chaplain, a Minute's Silence was observed in memory of former Councillors Ian Forrest and Barbara Gordon.

#### **54 Minutes Of The Previous Meeting**

The Minutes of the Council Forum meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

Members noted the apologies and absences of Councillors Brookfield and Connor, both of whom had not been able to attend a meeting recently and, to ensure that they were not affected by the six-month rule for non-attendance at Council Meetings, Council agreed to an extension for both Councillors until Annual Council in May 2022.

#### **55 Declarations of Interest**

No Declarations of Interest were submitted.

#### **56 Mayoral Communications**

The Mayor updated Members on recent events and activities he had attended and also gave a reminder about the forthcoming Mayor's Ball.

At this point of the meeting, Councillors Mohammed Khan and John Slater commented on the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine, condemning this action and hoping for a peaceful resolution as soon as possible.

#### **57 Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel**

Members received a report from the Independent Remuneration Panel, which had recently reviewed the Members Allowances Scheme.

The current scheme was introduced in May 2018, and therefore required review and for a revised scheme to be implemented from May 2022.

The Panel had been chaired once again by Ian Woolley, who had been assisted by Miranda Carruthers Watt and David Swift.

No major changes were recommended in the report, with only minimal changes to the existing scheme, and a draft new Members Allowances Scheme was attached at Appendix 2 of the report.

## **RESOLVED –**

That Finance Council approves the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel, as set out below and approve the draft Members Allowances as attached at Appendix 2 of this report, and agree for its implementation from May 2022.

1. The Panel ask that the Council note that the level of allowances paid at Blackburn with Darwen is generally lower than the other Councils looked at. The Panel notes the difficulties of comparing differing Councils, but feel that allowances such as the Leader for example, are comparatively low, but acknowledge the financial position of the Council, so are not recommending significant changes to the Scheme. However, the Panel feel that the lower levels of remuneration by Blackburn with Darwen needs to be addressed in future years, to bring them to a comparable level with counterparts, including increasing basic allowances to encourage more diversity and representation from people currently unable to devote time for public duties.
2. That the Council agree to introduce the following SRA payments:
  - SRA Payment for Vice Chair of the Standards Committee of £786 at current rates.
  - SRA Payment for Chair of Audit & Governance Committee (if not already receiving higher payment for other position) of £1572 in line with equivalent payment for Chair of Standards Committee. Also SRA payment for Vice Chair of Audit & Governance Committee if not already receiving higher payment for other position) of £786 in line with equivalent payment for Vice Chair of Standards Committee at current rates.
3. That increases to Basic Allowance and SRA payments each year continue to be in-line with the annual local government pay settlement and back dated as appropriate.
4. That the Council consider the introduction of a Parental Leave Policy to increase the diversity of Councillors.
5. The Panel stressed that the provision in the existing Members Allowances Scheme that only one SRA is paid (i.e. the highest amount) where more than one responsibility/position by any Councillor, is retained.
6. In the event of the establishment of any extra Committees/sub committees it is recommended that remuneration for any new responsibilities/positions are in line with existing comparator Committees.

**58 Provision of External Audit – PSAA Opt-in Invitation**

A report was submitted seeking agreement to join the national scheme for the procurement of External audit services with effect from the financial year 2023/24.

The Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) was now undertaking a procurement for the next appointing period, and the report submitted concluded that the sector led procurement conducted by the PSAA would produce better outcomes and be less burdensome than a local procurement exercise.

**RESOLVED** – That the PSAA invitation to opt into the sector- led option for the appointment of external auditors to principal local government and police bodies for five years from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 be accepted.

**59 Senior Management & Constitutional Update**

A report was submitted updating the Council on the appointment to the post of Director of Public Health (DPH), seeking approval of the permanent appointment of the statutory Monitoring Officer role, and a number of other changes as outlined in the report submitted, and highlighted in the recommendations below.

**RESOLVED** – That Council:

1. Endorse the decision of the Chief Officer Employment Committee to appoint Mr. Abdul Razaq to the post of Director of Public Health (DPH).
2. Note the decision of the Chief Officer Employment Committee to appoint the Interim Strategic Head of Service, Legal & Governance (MO) to the post of Deputy Director with responsibility for Legal & Governance Services who will act as the Council Solicitor, and approve that the post holder be appointed as the Council’s Monitoring Officer on a permanent basis.
3. Endorse the recommendation of the Chief Officer Employment Committee in respect of the re-designation and regrading of the post of Director in Place to Strategic Director.
4. Subject to 2 and 3 above, authorise the Monitoring Officer to update the Constitution and approve other updates to the Constitution reflecting the changes set out in this report.
5. Approve the Council’s Pay Policy Statement for 2022/23, reflecting the changes set out in this report.

**60 Statement on the Robustness of the Council’s Budget Calculations for 2022/23 and the Adequacy of Financial Reserves**

Members received a report on the robustness of the Council’s budget estimates for 2022/23 and the adequacy of financial reserves in accordance with Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003.

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

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

Councillors needed to have regard to the report when making decisions on the 2022/23 Budget

(Revenue Budget and Capital Programme) and the level of Council Tax for 2022/23.

## **RESOLVED –**

2.1 Finance Council is recommended to consider and have regard to the statements from the Director of Finance (as the Council's statutory finance officer) as provided at Appendix A when determining the Budget (Revenue Budget and Capital Programme) and the level of Council Tax for 2022/23.

### **61 Capital Programme and Capital Strategy 2022/25 and General Fund Revenue Budget 2022/23 (and Draft Financial Strategy 2022/25)**

The Executive Member for Finance and Governance, Councillor Vicky McGurk, on behalf of the Labour Group, presented proposals for the Capital Programme and Capital Strategy 2022/25 and General Fund Revenue Budget 2022/23 (and Draft Financial Strategy 2022/25).

In terms of the Capital Strategy, the report submitted sought approval for the 2022/23 – 2024/25 Capital Strategy, set out in Appendix 1 and Capital Programme, set out in Appendix 6. The Capital Strategy gave a high-level overview of how the Council's capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of local public services, along with an overview of how associated risks are managed and the implications for future financial sustainability. Decisions made this year on capital and treasury management would have financial consequences for the Authority for many years into the future. They were therefore subject to both a national regulatory framework and to a local policy framework, summarised in the report.

A report was also submitted recommending proposals for the Revenue Budget 2022/23 together with a Financial Strategy 2022/25.

The report provided details of the Autumn Budget and Comprehensive Spending Review, as it impacted on Local Government, and information on the Local Government Finance Settlement, details of which were confirmed by the Secretary of State for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) on 9th February 2022.

The development of the budget for 2022/23 was set against the backdrop of over a decade of austerity which had resulted in the Council experiencing one of the highest funding reductions of Unitary Councils across the Country over that period. This was despite being amongst the most deprived Boroughs according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation.

Latterly, this position had been compounded by the deep impact of Covid-19 with Blackburn with Darwen experiencing some of the worst and enduring effects of the Pandemic. At the time of writing, the Pandemic remained with rates of infection in the Borough continuing to be a cause for concern and the pressure on the delivery of Council Services, both in terms of reductions in income and additional costs of both response to and recovery from the Pandemic, continuing to impact.

Underpinning the development of the budget for 2022/23 (and the Council's Financial Strategy and Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/25) was the continuing impact of austerity. Although the Council's Core Spending Power for 2022/23 had increased, that increase was neither sufficient to make up for the funding reductions experienced by the Council since 2010 nor reflective of

the significant changes in demand for services. As a consequence, the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan still showed a forecast funding deficit for which action would need to be taken to ensure the Council remains financially sustainable.

The report set out funding allocations for 2022/23, along with cost pressures, Government assumptions relating to Council Tax in 2022/23, the Council's Council Tax base for 2022/23, development of the base budget, reserves and balances, and the Financial Strategy and Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 to 2025/26.

Following debate, there was then a recorded vote on the recommendations in both reports, with Councillors voting as follows:

### **FOR**

*Councillors , Akhtar H, Akhtar P, Bateson, Browne, Casey, Desai M, Desai S, Fazal, Fielding, Floyd, Gunn, Humphrys, Hussain M, Jan-Virmani, Khan M, Khan Z, Khonat, Liddle, Mahmood, McFall, McGurk, Oates, Patel A, Rawat,, Riley, Sidat, Shorrocks, Smith D, Smith J, Talbot, Taylor and Whittle.*

### **AGAINST**

*Councillors Baldwin, Gee, Marrow, Patel Alt, Rigby, Russell, Salton, Slater Jacq, Slater Jo, Slater Ju, and Slater N.*

### **ABSTAIN**

*Councillor Derek Hardman.*

### **RESOLVED – That Finance Council:**

#### **Capital Programme and Capital Strategy Report 2022/25**

1.1. approve the Capital Strategy for 2022/25 (in Appendix 1), including: a) the Council's Capitalisation Policy, as outlined in Appendix 2; b) the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement, which determines the Council's policy for repayment of debt (Appendix 3); c) the proposed prudential indicators for the forthcoming year (Appendix 4); d) the proposed Investment Strategy for 2022/23, as outlined in Appendix 5. e) the proposed Use of Capital Receipts Strategy, as outlined in Appendix 6.

1.2. Approve the proposed Capital Programme for 2022/25, as outlined in Appendix 6 and Appendix 6A.

1.3. Note the indicative programmes for 2023/24 and 2024/25 as shown in Appendix 6 and acknowledge that these will be subject to further review as part of the development of future years capital programmes.

1.4 Delegate authority to the Director of Finance to determine the most appropriate method of financing the capital programme.

#### **General Fund Revenue Budget 2022/23 (and Draft Financial Strategy 2022/25)**

- 1.1 Acknowledging the impact of the increase in the National Living Wage as set out in the report, give delegated authority to the Strategic Director for Adults and Health, in consultation with the Executive Members for Adult Services and Prevention, and Finance and Governance, to agree the hourly rates and contract changes for Social Care Providers for 2022/23;
- b) approve the service investment proposals as set out in the report;
  - c) approve the savings proposals as set out at Appendix B;
  - d) note the estimated balance of reserves as at 31st March 2022 as shown at Appendix C;
  - e) approve the General Fund Budget Requirement for 2022/23 as set out at Appendix D to this report;
  - f) require each Portfolio to operate within the individual Portfolio Controllable Budgets for 2022/23 as set out at Appendix D and that these be cash limited and subject to regular monitoring and control;
  - g) agree that the current Local Council Tax Support Scheme remains unchanged for 2022/23 and note the intention to undertake a review of the Scheme in the forthcoming year;
  - h) approve an increase in the general Council Tax of 1.99% (reflecting a weekly increase of £1.25 for Band D Council Tax payers and of £0.83p for Band A Council Tax payers);
  - i) approve an additional increase in Council Tax of 2.00% to contribute towards the additional costs of Adult Social Care;
  - j) give approval to the Financial Strategy and Medium Term Financial Plan for 2022/25 as set out Appendix F and note that a further report on the implementation of the Strategy will be submitted to the Executive Board in June 2022.

## **60 Council Tax 2022/23**

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

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

The Council was also required to set a basic amount of Council Tax for the financial year 2022/23. The Council Tax was set on the basis of:

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

The Council was recommended to approve the draft resolution setting the Council Tax for 2022/23, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report submitted and in also in the Appendix to these Minutes. Following discussion, Finance Council moved to a recorded vote, with Councillors voting as follows:

### **FOR**



*Councillors Akhtar H, Akhtar P, Bateson, Casey, Desai M, Desai S, Fazal, Fielding, Floyd, Gunn, Humphrys, Hussain M, Jan-Virmani, Khan M, Khan Z, Khonat, Liddle, Mahmood, McFall, McGurk, Oates, Patel A, Rawat,, Riley, Sidat, Shorrocks, Smith D, Smith J, Talbot, Taylor and Whittle.*

**AGAINST**

*Councillors Baldwin, Browne, Hardman, Gee, Marrow, Patel Alt, Rigby, Russell, Salton, Slater Jacq, Slater Jo, Slater Ju, and Slater N.*

**ABSTAIN**

*None.*

Signed at a meeting of the Council Forum

on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022

(being the ensuing meeting on the Council) by

MAYOR

### Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

#### Draft Council Tax Resolution 2022/23 – Finance Council 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022

##### **The Council is recommended to resolve as follows:**

1. That it be noted that on 12th January 2022, the Council calculated the Council Tax Base for the year 2022/23 in accordance with regulations made under Section 31B(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (the Act):
  - a) 35,439.30 being the Council Tax Base for the whole of the Council area (Item T in the formula in Section 31B of the Act); and
  - b) for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a Parish precept relates, as detailed in Appendix 2.
2. That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2022/23 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
  - a) £402,794,112 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) (a) to (f) of the Act taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils.
  - b) £342,458,926 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) (a) to (d) of the Act.
  - c) £60,335,186 being the amount by which the aggregate at 2 (a) above exceeds the aggregate at 2 (b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act).
  - d) £1,702.49 being the amount at 2 (c) above (Item R) divided by the amount at 1(a) above (Item T), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish precepts).
  - e) £164,384.02 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish precepts) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act (see Appendix 2).
  - f) £1,697.85 Being the amount at 2 (d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 2 (e) above by Item T (1 (a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34 (2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish precept relates.

3. That it be noted that for the year 2022/23 the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Lancashire has issued a precept to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as indicated in the tables below.
4. That it be noted that for the year 2022/23 the Lancashire Combined Fire Authority has issued a precept to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as indicated in the tables below, however at the time of writing this report, the precept had yet to be presented to the Lancashire Fire Authority meeting (held on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2022).
5. That the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the aggregate amounts shown in the tables below as the amounts of Council Tax for the year 2022/23 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings.

a) Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

<u>Part of the Council's Area</u>	<u>Valuation Bands</u>							
	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>H</u>
Eccleshill Parish	£1,149.24	£1,340.78	£1,532.32	£1,723.86	£2,106.94	£2,490.02	£2,873.10	£3,447.72
Livesey Parish	£1,137.41	£1,326.97	£1,516.54	£1,706.11	£2,085.25	£2,464.38	£2,843.52	£3,412.22
North Turton Parish	£1,144.00	£1,334.67	£1,525.33	£1,716.00	£2,097.33	£2,478.67	£2,860.00	£3,432.00
Pleasington Parish	£1,135.65	£1,324.92	£1,514.20	£1,703.47	£2,082.02	£2,460.57	£2,839.12	£3,406.94
Tockholes Parish	£1,159.34	£1,352.56	£1,545.79	£1,739.01	£2,125.46	£2,511.90	£2,898.35	£3,478.02
Yate and Pickup Bank Parish	£1,146.65	£1,337.76	£1,528.87	£1,719.98	£2,102.20	£2,484.42	£2,866.63	£3,439.96
Darwen Town Council	£1,140.55	£1,330.64	£1,520.73	£1,710.82	£2,091.00	£2,471.18	£2,851.37	£3,421.64
All other parts of the Council's area	£1,131.90	£1,320.55	£1,509.20	£1,697.85	£2,075.15	£2,452.45	£2,829.75	£3,395.70

b) Major Precepting Authorities

<u>Precepting Authority</u>	<u>Valuation Bands</u>							
	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>H</u>
Lancashire Police Authority	£157.63	£183.91	£210.18	£236.45	£288.99	£341.54	£394.08	£472.90
Lancashire Combined Fire Authority	£51.51	£60.10	£68.68	£77.27	£94.44	£111.61	£128.78	£154.54

c) Aggregate Council Tax

<u>Part of the Council's Area</u>	<u>Valuation Bands</u>							
	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>H</u>
Eccleshill Parish	£1,358.38	£1,584.79	£1,811.18	£2,037.58	£2,490.37	£2,943.17	£3,395.96	£4,075.16
Livesey Parish	£1,346.55	£1,570.98	£1,795.40	£2,019.83	£2,468.68	£2,917.53	£3,366.38	£4,039.66
North Turton Parish	£1,353.14	£1,578.68	£1,804.19	£2,029.72	£2,480.76	£2,931.82	£3,382.86	£4,059.44
Pleasington Parish	£1,344.79	£1,568.93	£1,793.06	£2,017.19	£2,465.45	£2,913.72	£3,361.98	£4,034.38
Tockholes Parish	£1,368.48	£1,596.57	£1,824.65	£2,052.73	£2,508.89	£2,965.05	£3,421.21	£4,105.46
Yate and Pickup Bank Parish	£1,355.79	£1,581.77	£1,807.73	£2,033.70	£2,485.63	£2,937.57	£3,389.49	£4,067.40
Darwen Town Council	£1,349.69	£1,574.65	£1,799.59	£2,024.54	£2,474.43	£2,924.33	£3,374.23	£4,049.08
All other parts of the Council's area	£1,341.04	£1,564.56	£1,788.06	£2,011.57	£2,458.58	£2,905.60	£3,352.61	£4,023.14

## Appendix 2

### Town and Parish Council Precepts

<u>Parish / Town Council</u>	<u>2021/22</u>				<u>2022/23</u>				<u>Council Tax Increase / (Reduction) Council Tax Band D 2022/23 less 2021/22</u> £
	<u>Tax Base</u>	<u>Precepts</u> £	<u>Grant</u> £	<u>Council Tax Band D</u> £	<u>Tax Base</u>	<u>Precepts</u> £	<u>Grant</u> £	<u>Council Tax Band D</u> £	
Eccleshill Parish	93.38	2,429.00	413.50	26.01	94.66	2,462.11	413.50	26.01	0.00
Livesey Parish	2,086.29	17,233.00	1,371.00	8.26	2,235.21	18,463.00	1,371.00	8.26	0.00
North Turton Parish	1,756.24	32,159.00	1,241.00	18.31	1,771.66	32,159.00	1,241.00	18.15	(0.16)
Pleasington Parish	256.55	1,450.00	0.00	5.65	257.93	1,450.00	0.00	5.62	(0.03)
Tockholes Parish	204.40	8,159.63	146.00	39.92	208.33	8,574.91	146.00	41.16	1.24
Yate and Pickup Bank Parish	141.60	3,133.00	260.00	22.13	143.68	3,180.00	260.00	22.13	0.00
Darwen Town Council	7,281.78	98,095.00	23,905.00	13.47	7,560.39	98,095.00	23,905.00	12.97	(0.50)
<b>TOTAL / AVERAGE</b>	<b>11,820.24</b>	<b>162,658.63</b>	<b>27,336.50</b>	<b>4.66</b>	<b>12,271.86</b>	<b>164,384.02</b>	<b>27,336.50</b>	<b>4.64</b>	<b>(0.02)</b>

## 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:                        **24<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2022**

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)

<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR GROWTH &amp; DEVELOPMENT</b>
<b>TO:</b>	<b>COUNCIL FORUM</b>
<b>ON:</b>	<b>24<sup>th</sup> March 2022</b>

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**SUBJECT:** Pennine Lancashire Building Control – Withdrawal from Joint Agreement

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## **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

To seek approval for Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council (BwDBC), as a Partner Authority of the Pennine Lancashire Building Control (PLBC) Partnership Agreement, to give notice of withdrawal from membership of the Joint Committee and proceed with all withdrawal arrangements including completion of contractual obligations and settlement of financial commitments.

Burnley Council is the other Partner Authority of PLBC, and by mutual consent they are similarly progressing their approval arrangements to withdraw from the Partnership Agreement.

## **2. OPTIONS**

Not applicable.

## **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 To approve the issuing of a written notice of withdrawal of BwDBC from the PLBC Partnership Agreement; and
- 3.2 To delegate authority for completion of all exit arrangements, including but not limited to contractual obligations, settlement of financial commitments and staff transfers to the Strategic Director of Place in consultation with the Executive Member for Growth and Development.

## **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The PLBC joint service agreement was established in 2009, and created a single shared service for the delivery of statutory Building Control functions, with an integrated strategy and ICT solution. BwDBC and Burnley Council are the only Partner Authorities.
- 4.2 As the service has evolved over the years, a number of challenges have arisen, with key issues identified as follows:
  - The service is a statutory service which operates in a competitive market amongst approved inspectors;

- Recruitment and retention of building surveyors has been extremely challenging due to competition from approved inspectors and increasing expectations, causing a shortage of resources within the team and added pressure on individuals;
- The post-Grenfell Building Safety Bill anticipates more responsibility and accountability for Building Control professionals and authorities;
- Despite being a joint service, in practice the team operates as two distinct sub-teams at two separate locations with two separate websites which combine to limit the scope for greater service integration and resource utilisation; and
- Whilst the digitisation of procedures is underway, there are process inefficiencies and differing operating systems within the two office bases.

## **5. RATIONALE**

- 5.1 For the reasons set out above, along with the potential to improve customer service and team integration for the Building Control teams within their respective authorities, the recommendation is to progress with a mutually-agreed joint withdrawal from the PLBC agreement. The proposal to seek approvals for withdrawal was discussed and approved by the PLBC joint committee on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2022. Therefore, each of the member Councils are now requested to formally approve the issuing of withdrawal notices, with further work to be undertaken to finalise exit arrangements.
- 5.2 The existing formal agreement allows a Partner Authority to withdraw from membership by giving 24 months notice (or such shorter period of time agreed by the Partner Authorities). As both Partner Authorities have indicated an agreement to mutually withdraw, a suggested date for formal end of the agreement is 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, with each authority anticipated to be working independently by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022. Final agreement on timescales is to be delegated to the Strategic Director of Place in consultation with the Executive Member for Growth and Development.
- 5.3 The alternative option, considered by the PLBC Joint Committee in January 2022, was to work towards addressing the on-going challenges by significantly reconfiguring and restructuring the service. This would involve operating from a single office base, creating a single web presence and working as one team under one set of procedures. This option was not taken forward because it would have resulted in the Building Control teams continuing to be disconnected from their wider Council teams.
- 5.4 Officers from both teams have worked positively to develop the current arrangements but as the priorities and operational needs of each Council have evolved since 2009, it is now apparent in 2022 that the authorities could be better served by re-integrating each Building Control team within their respective growth and development services.
- 5.5 The proposed withdrawal will allow for the BwDBC and Burnley Building Control sub-teams to be better integrated within their wider respective departments at each

authority. This will enable more effective local decisions to be taken regarding new back-office systems, procedures and resourcing whilst continuing to collaborate and support each other whenever necessary.

## **6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The recommendation will allow for more localised decision-making for the service, such as for the provision of new back-office systems, procedures, service efficiencies and resourcing.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 Financial implications of the withdrawal are to be determined, with final agreement delegated to the Strategic Director of Place. Service costs and income are expected to be proportionate to the Council's share of the existing service and therefore the proposal would not result in adverse financial impacts, however there is a possibility that as the detail of the new service is worked up there are increased costs going forward. Service improvements could result in an increased market share when competing with Approved Inspectors and therefore the Council could see fee income rising over time.

7.2 Each member authority is required by the PLBC Joint Agreement to continue to meet its share of the financial commitment, liabilities and costs, and contractual obligations, until the conclusion of the commitment or obligation as provided for in the contract. A new budget for the service would therefore need to be agreed from the 2023 / 24 financial year.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Both authorities will be required to comply with the withdrawal procedures set out within the PLBC Joint Agreement and associated documents.

## **9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

The resource implications of the withdrawal are to be determined following consultation, with final agreement delegated to the Strategic Director of Place.

## **10. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

The impacts checklist indicates that an equality impacts assessment is not required.

## **11. CONSULTATIONS**

Should both Councils approve the commencement of withdrawal proceedings, the necessary consultations with the Building Control teams will be carried out where any transfers may become required.

### **Chief Officer/Member**

Contact Officer: Martin Kelly  
Date: 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022



Background Papers: Pennine Lancashire Building Control Partnership Agreement

Background documents are any files, guidance or other materials that have been relied upon in producing the paper. Any background documents listed must be available for public inspection upon request.

*Form Reference Standard Committee Report Template May 2012 1.0*



<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE</b>
<b>TO:</b>	<b>COUNCIL FORUM</b>
<b>ON:</b>	<b>24<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2022</b>

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**SUBJECT            Procurement Strategy and Social Value Policy**

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## **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

The Council has developed a new Procurement Strategy and Social Value Policy to ensure that every pound the Council spends maximises value for money for the Borough and helps to deliver the priorities of the Council.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Council Forum:

- Notes the Executive Board approval of the Procurement Strategy and Social Value Policy;
- Approves the Social Value Policy.

## **3. BACKGROUND**

The Council's previous procurement strategy was out of date and in need of updating to respond to a range of factors that make effective procurement more important than ever.

Social Value has been approached by the Council on a case by case basis to date with some successes but there is an opportunity to drive out much more benefits for the borough with a policy that sets out a clear approach and priorities.

The Government has issued a National Procurement Policy and a number of Procurement Policy Notes which set out the government's priorities for procurement as the country recovers from the effects of the pandemic. The Government has also issued a Green Paper on Transforming Public Procurement setting out its proposals for changes to procurement regulations after the UK's departure from the European Union.

Procurement will play a key role in the Council delivering its medium term financial strategy and in meeting the aim of being net zero by 2030 set out in the Climate Emergency Declaration. In addition pressures in supply chains caused by the pandemic and Brexit have emphasised the need for effective procurement and contract management.

The Council has also recently participated in a Local Government Association (LGA) benchmarking exercise for procurement which identified a number of areas of strength to be built on together with some opportunities to strengthen the Council's procurement arrangements. Notable strengths were related to working with partners, managing strategic risk and engaging VCSEs. Areas for improvement included engaging Councillors, contract and relationship management and obtaining social value. Implementation of the strategy and policy will address these areas for improvement.

The Procurement Strategy and Social Value Policy provides the outline and framework for the Council's response to the above issues and challenges.

At the Executive Board meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2022, Members approved the Procurement Strategy and Social Value Policy, with a recommendation that Full Council approve the Social Value Policy.

The links to the report submitted to Executive Board are below:

[EBD1: Executive Board Decision \(blackburn.gov.uk\)](#)

[Appendix 1](#)

[Appendix 2 - Procurement SV](#)

Council Forum is therefore requested to approve the Social Value Policy.

## **Council Forum 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

### **Progress of the People, Place and Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committees.**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met in March to continue their work Programmes and look at the key issues affecting the Council and how the challenges were being met.

#### People Overview and Scrutiny Committee 7<sup>th</sup> March 2022.

##### Health of the Borough.

The Committee met on 7<sup>th</sup> March and received an update on public health in the Borough from Professor Dominic Harrison. The Committee were informed of the actions that had been taken by the Council and other directors of public health in the northwest following the government's decision to step down restrictions and reduce testing. He outlined local guidance that included the continued wearing of masks in shops, on transport and public places, the continued testing when symptoms are displayed and self-isolation where necessary. 75 year olds would be eligible for a 4<sup>th</sup> jab in spring along with vulnerable adults and this would be administered through GPs. Professor Harrison drew attention to the recent infections which now included one third reinfections with one of the two Omicron variants. The Committee were informed that in the future it was assumed that the virus would follow a cycle like the cold virus and that it would re appear in the population in summer and if not by autumn.

The Committee discussed the effects of long covid and it was noted that about 2%-4% of those who had had Covid were likely to suffer from long covid and this was not related to the severity of the infection. The symptoms of long covid were similar to those ME. The complex issues including the effects on mental health that young people would have in future years and the lack of access to face to face GP was discussed and members were informed that the borough had the 8<sup>th</sup> lowest number of GPs per population in the country and this has been raised with the CCG.

The Committee requested that they continue to be kept informed of the situation relating to Covid and especially how the long term effects of covid will be dealt with in the borough. The Committee also requested that they be kept informed of the efforts to ensure that the ratio of GP's to the population of the borough is increased.

##### A Child of the North

The Committee received a joint presentation from the Strategic Director Children's Services and The Director of Public Health on the Child of the North report. The report had been published in December 2021 by the Northern Health N8 Research Partnership Science Alliance and written by over 40 leading academics from across the North of England. The report highlighted the inequality for children growing up in the North of England compared with those in the rest of the country. The report called for policies to reduce child poverty and increase funding for preventative services. 18 recommendations were outlined that addressed the greater risk for children in the north of becoming involved with statutory Children's Services, the care system and acute mental health services.

The Committee discussed the ways in which the recommendations affected the outcomes for children and how we could make sure that a difference was achieved. The Committee considered ways that all members of the Council were aware of the challenges outlined in the findings and requested that a presentation be made to all members and partner organisations in the delivery of services to children. Members were also conscious of the need to ensure that the delivery of all council services consider the implications for children in everything they

do. The Committee noted the implications of the Report on Child of the North and the negative outcomes for children in the borough in comparison with those in the South of England and recommended to the executive member that a seminar be held for all members outlining the findings of the report, the implications for the children and ways that the Council can shape its policies and services to mitigate the effects on children in the borough. The Committee also asked that the Executive Board be recommended to consider the introduction of a paragraph on all policy reports outlining how the recommendations affect the outcome of children in the borough in a similar way to how financial and legal implications are outlined.

#### Send Methodology Testing Feedback

The Committee were presented with the findings of the joint Ofsted and CQC methodology testing pilot that had been carried out to see how well local areas fulfil their responsibilities for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The borough had been approached by Ofsted and the CQC to support them to test their new methodology for local area SEND inspections.

The process had been carried out over three weeks in November 2021, the purpose being-

- To test out some new ways to gather evidence about the way children and young people with send are supported
- Provide the inspectorates with valuable information about how well possible new approaches work in practice and help to identify where further improvements or thinking was needed.

The Committee were informed of the work that had been required by the departments and Health partners and the challenges that had been met. These had included meeting very tight deadlines in tracking evidence and gaining consent from parents and carers of children and young people. Members were informed feedback which included the following -

- Dedicated and passionate staff who know children and young people well
- Send support services- school staff highlighted the valuable support.
- Clear examples of creative approaches to provide support.
- Practitioners were positive to find a way around things
- Practitioners appreciated practical hand holding with additional support to access
- Children and young people and parents and carers views were listened to and acted upon.

The members were informed of the areas that they were aware needed to be looked at and address and the steps being taken to improve together with the areas that had been exacerbated by covid. The Committee thanked the Children's Services Department and Partners for all the hard work that had been put in to the SEND Methodology Testing and welcomed the positive outcome.

#### Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 14<sup>th</sup> March 2020

The Committee looked at the key areas of their work programme for the year and developments that had taken place following initial scrutiny. The Committee also looked at the issue of trees in the borough and how we manage them.

#### Trees.

The Committee looked at the issue of trees as a scrutiny topic for a number of reasons including ash die back, the recent storms, planting initiatives and public concerns. The Council is responsible for the care, development and maintenance of tens of thousands of trees owned

by the Council, which are located in Council parks, open spaces and on the highway. As a Council we are committed to maintaining the health and longevity of all Council trees through appropriate management including:

- Appropriate works will be undertaken on dead or unhealthy trees.
- Tree works is undertaken by fully qualified arborists, in line with management surveys and plans.

The Council did not generally undertake works to otherwise healthy and well-formed trees for reasons of:

- Size
- Leaf, seed, twig or flower litter
- Shade or blocked views
- Interference with transmitted signals, e.g. television, satellite channel access
- Honeydew exudation
- Reduced security by virtue of concealment
- Alleged root damage to property.

The Committee noted that the Council does not have a responsibility for tree on private land or un-adopted land.

The Committee looked at the issue of Ash dieback and the effects that this will have on trees in the borough and across the country. Ash trees are the third most common tree in Britain, they are present in woodlands, hedgerows and parks and gardens across the country and have a cultural significance in our urban and rural landscapes. They are also a valuable habitats for over 1,000 species of wildlife. It is estimated that there are more than 60 million ash trees outside woodlands in the UK and that the majority will become affected with ash dieback in years to come. Members were informed of the main issues for the council arising from die back and the work that was to be done on an ash die back plan which required the council to identify the number and condition of ash trees on Council owned land and or near the highway. Members were informed that public safety was the priority for assessing what action to be taken.

The Committee looked at the process for reporting issues with trees and residents responsibilities and the management issues with council owned trees. The Committee were also informed of the recent decision at the Finance Council to increase resources to deal with tree related issues.

Members looked at the targets for tree planting in the borough to help mitigate climate change and how the planting of trees was progressing. The Committee supported the work of to involve community groups and schools in this. Members requested that the planting of value added trees such as fruit trees be investigated which could enhance community areas. The Committee also suggested that schools involvement be sought in helping compile the tree audit as this could be a learning activity.

#### Waste and Recycling

The Committee were updated on the progress of the waste and recycling collection. 98 tonnes more recycling had been achieved in the year to December and this represented real progress. Blue bin collection of waste card and paper had also increased with very little spoiled content which generated greater income to the council. Grey Bin collection content had also improved with contamination down from 36% to 24%, a significant improvement. Members were informed of the proposal to engage an additional education officer in order to boost collection further. The Committee will continue to monitor the collection and recycling rates.

### Cemeteries and Burials

The Committee were updated on the progress in identifying and establishing new cemeteries in the borough. Tests were ongoing at two sites and the outcome would be reported to the committee in the next municipal year.

### The Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee meets on 21<sup>st</sup> March and will look at the Eat Well Move More Shape Up Strategy refresh 2022-25. The strategy is a one of the key strategies of the Health and Wellbeing Board and members will be aware that one of the duties of the Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to review the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board and to review its efficiency and effectiveness. The Chair of the Committee will update the Council Forum on the progress of the meeting.

### Call-In Committee, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2022

The chair will update the Council Forum on the outcome of the meeting.

Sylvia Liddle, Chair of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Suleman Khonat, Chair of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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

Kevin Connor, Chair of the Call-in Committee.

## REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR MOHAMMED KHAN

Date 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022

### **Cost of Living**

We are living through tough financial times at the moment and know many of our residents are worried about the ongoing increase in the cost of living with energy bills, fuel and people's weekly food bills all going up. We don't want people to struggle though – there is a range of local and national help and areas of support available on issues around money and debt, homes and housing, fuel costs, food, gambling and work and employment and our financial resilience campaign which has been running since February is signposting residents.

Help includes the Household Support Scheme for families and children and other vulnerable adults - who may or may not meet the threshold for benefits but may be affected by the cost of living crisis - to get support with utility bills, food and other essentials throughout the winter period to help keep them warm and fed. The scheme, from the Council and partners, will run until 31st March.

There is also our Help Hub, started in March 2020 with our partners in urgent response to the first pandemic lockdown, which can still help with food banks, credit unions, and lots more.

### **Queen's Platinum Jubilee**

The borough is gearing up for a long weekend of celebrations to mark Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June. A range of activities are planned as the Queen becomes the first monarch ever to reign for 70 years.

Talented Blackburn artist Jamie Holman has been commissioned to create a new masterpiece marking the Jubilee and we look forward to seeing his work in Blackburn. We're also supporting Darwen Scouts to arrange a lighting of a beacon at Darwen's Jubilee Tower. We will be running a competition to decide who lights the beacon.

Blackburn and Darwen town centres will both be dressed for the occasion with bunting and new jubilee themed planting displays. A 'Last Night of the Proms' celebration and Darwen Live will be taking place amongst a long list of community organised events in the borough over the weekend.

We're also encouraging residents to come together with friends, family and neighbours to arrange a 'Big Jubilee Lunch' and street parties. We are sharing planning guides for residents, including details on road closures and more. Tree planting will be encouraged through the official Queen's Green Canopy Scheme.

Blackburn is also, of course, bidding for City Status as part of the Jubilee honours and we are eagerly awaiting the decision on whether we have been successful this Spring.



## **Ukraine**

We have been shocked and horrified by the unprovoked and escalating invasion of Ukraine by Russia. The aggression is being rightly condemned across the world. I know I am not alone in sending my thoughts and prayers to those who are facing this terrible crisis.

Blackburn with Darwen stands in solidarity with Ukrainians across Blackburn with Darwen and the UK. We urge world-leaders to work together to restore peace. We also know that our residents with roots in Russia, and the wider region, will have deep concerns about what is happening too, so it's important not to tar them with the actions of the state.

Immediate action is needed from the Government to work with local councils, like ourselves, to prepare the necessary support and resources needed for refugees who come to the UK. Blackburn with Darwen has a proud history of supporting those in need, and we will do what we can to maintain that throughout this time. Donations can be made towards the internationally recognised British Red Cross appeal with donation points available across communities.

## **Covid-19**

At the last update we were in the middle of the Omicron wave, which we know resulted in huge case rates and lots of disruption for many. The situation has changed quite dramatically since then and the Government has now announced its Living with Covid Plan, where regulations are replaced with Public Health advice and an emphasis on personal responsibility in the same way we manage other infectious illnesses. We know that free testing will end for most residents on the 31<sup>st</sup> March, however will remain for certain settings, such as care homes and hospitals and for some of our more vulnerable residents. We are yet to get the full details of this and as always will share information as soon as we have it.

Whilst the regulations have been lifted, we do however need to maintain our resilience and be able to step up and respond to future variants or surges in cases and we are working on our own local living with Covid plan to ensure we can respond appropriately if needed. It is important to remember that Covid has not gone away and we should still come forward for vaccinations and ask that everyone continues to follow the guidance to keep everyone safe.

Much of our focus will now move on to recovery and how we can support everyone to live and work safely with Covid.

## **Our Community, Our Future social integration programme**

The Community Ambassador project continues to be delivered. The Borough will benefit from more Community Ambassadors ready to support social action, driven by residents who have the desire and willingness to do more in their own community.

From January 2022, a number of partners from the Strategic Youth Alliance continued to deliver the Youth Ambassador project. Youth Ambassadors have increased their awareness of opportunities to get involved in local social action and to become friends with more people from across the borough so they feel much more connected than ever before. This project harnesses the strength of having one of the largest youth populations in the country and provides real focus towards self-belief, thinking bigger and becoming a valuable part of the borough's future.

Our Workforce Integration Ambassador project delivered by Blackburn College has now concluded. The Ambassadors all come from local employers who are aiming to breakdown cultural and practical barriers for a much more diverse workforce. Going forward employers will aim to recruit from a wider talent pool because of this training, which will support economic growth and retain residents to take up employment opportunities rather than look elsewhere.

### **Health and Wellbeing Board**

The Health and Wellbeing Board met on the 26<sup>th</sup> January 2022 for a Development Session on Mental Wellbeing. The session was designed to clearly define mental wellbeing and to raise its importance with the Board. Colleagues from Public Health presented numerous pieces of work that they have been developing including the Prevention Concordat, a 12 month action plan for mental health and the Mental Wellbeing Inequalities Framework. The outcomes of the session will be the signing up to the Prevention Concordat by the Board at their next meeting.

### **Health and Care Integration**

To support the continued enhancement of the four Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs) an internal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis has taken place to inform the development of an annual development plan. Once produced, the plan which will be overseen by the Integrated Neighbourhood Clinical Co-ordinators who will set out a series of key priorities and milestones to be implemented across the West, North, East and Darwen INTs. Over the next few weeks the INT Clinical Co-ordinators will provide INT members with the opportunity to engage and be involved in the development.

As we have continued to experience high numbers of referrals into the INTs over the past few months there is much learning and key insights to reflect upon. Key strengths that have been identified include the wider membership of the INTs, the positive working relationships between members of each INT and the joint planning and co-ordination that takes place on a daily basis which helps hundreds of local people and their family members throughout BwD receive the best possible health, social care and community support available.

The Social Prescribing Alliance continues to be an important asset for the BwD neighbourhood workforce and is expanding on a monthly basis. The Alliance provides a support network for the borough's Social Prescribing Link Workers who are currently developing a range of new marketing materials throughout the local community to further promote the support available for local people. The Social

Prescribing Chronic Pain partnership group which has been established to provide an advanced, innovative wrap around offer for local people who live with chronic pain is progressing well. Work is underway to ensure evidence-based wellbeing interventions are included as part of the offer to help local people live alongside their pain whilst living a meaningful life.

The Government also published its [integration white paper](#) last month. Under the plans, local authorities and the NHS will be encouraged to share data and be more transparent about their performance. A new integrated system will also allow the NHS to notify a local authority immediately if someone needs social care support. The white paper builds on both the Health and Social Care Bill and the People at the Heart of Care white paper, announced in December, which set out a 10-year plan for social care funded through the Health and Care Levy.

### **Devolution**

The 15 councils across Lancashire are continuing to work in close collaboration on a proposal for a devolution (county) deal with Government. All 15 of the councils, which includes Blackburn with Darwen Council, Lancashire County Council, Blackpool Council and the 12 districts are engaged in political discussions around a shared vision and ambition, making steps to progress a strategic long term plan for Lancashire and discussing arrangements around a devolution deal.

### **National Festival of Making 2022**

The award-winning National Festival of Making returns for its fourth edition on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of June 2022. Planning and preparations are progressing with our partners. In the run up to the event, the Festival's organisers have launched the "The Big Reinvention Challenge" in collaboration with creative educators, Little Inventors. The Challenge invites children aged 7-12 to use what we already have as a starting point to create something new. Three of the most unique and inspiring ideas submitted by children will be brought to life as prototypes or models by professional makers.

Significant crowds are expected in Blackburn over the Festival weekend. This will create a wonderful atmosphere and we hope it will also be a means of strengthening the economy of our local businesses who have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, it will be a great opportunity for the community to come together and enjoy an exciting array of events, continuing that feeling of euphoria and cohesion in the town from the Platinum Jubilee celebrations the previous week.

I would recommend that you all share the details of this wonderful festival to family and friends. I will provide more details at future meetings. We are working with many partners to ensure the Festival continues to be a huge success. I invite all members to attend the Festival and promote our borough as a great place to live, work and visit.

## **REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

**COUNCILLOR JIM SMITH**

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING  
DIRECTOR: MARTIN EDEN  
DATE: 24 MARCH 2022**

### **Illicit Tobacco Prosecution**

Following two trading standards raids which netted approximately £177,000 of illicit tobacco, two men have pleaded guilty at Preston Crown court to offences relating to the possession and supply of that tobacco.

Sarhad Rashid pleaded guilty to one count of possessing over 8000 counterfeit cigarettes for supply at a storage unit in Blackburn in March 2018; he was sentenced to 12 weeks imprisonment, suspended for 12 months. He must also undertake 80 hours unpaid work and 15 activity days under a rehabilitation order, and pay £750 towards costs.

Alan Ahmad pleaded guilty to nine offences relating to illicit tobacco which was found at his shop in Blackburn in November 2018, including fraudulent trading. He was sentenced 12 months imprisonment for each of 7 offences, to run concurrently. He was also sentenced to 3 months imprisonment, again to run concurrently, for two other offences. The imprisonment was suspended for 18 months. He must also undertake 150 hours of unpaid work and rehabilitation activity.

A Proceeds of Crime application relating to Ahmad was made and confiscation proceedings will take place on 24th June 22; costs for him will be decided at this point too.

This outcome is the result of a great piece of partnership work between trading standards, Legal Services, the police and Blackpool Trading Standards (who supplied the financial investigator). Crown court cases involve a huge amount of work for the investigating officer and Legal Services, and this outcome has made that worthwhile.

### **Driver Training**

Each year the service trains 2 of its refuse and recycling collection operatives to become qualified LGV drivers, however due to the national problems associated with LGV driver availability, the service has moved quickly to ensure that we are not compromised with service delivery. Within the last 9 months the service has sent 4 staff through their LGV training, with 2 more staff being identified for the training.

It is a credit to the Council that its refuse and recycling services have continued during the pandemic and also during the current lack of LGV drivers, with Blackburn with Darwen delivering services when other councils have had to suspend services due to a lack of staff.

The problem of driver availability is also affecting the street cleansing service, as the vehicles used also require drivers to hold at least a category C1 on their licence. The street cleansing service has struggled to recruit to its vacant posts. However, with the agreement of the Trade Unions, the environment service has developed a career grade approach to attract interest from applicants from both within and outside of the council, who have a normal car licence (category B) and will arrange for suitable applicants to be put through category C1 or category C training.

### **Additional Investment**

Following the Finance Council approval for additional investment in Environmental Services, the service is recruiting to the newly established posts, with a view to having staff available as soon as possible from the beginning of April in a number of posts, ranging from litter clearance, parks, environmental education, tackling ash dieback and mechanical sweeping. The Saturday caged collection service will commence from April with each Ward being visited by three caged vehicles, on at least 2 occasions in the year, to collect waste presented by residents.

The Council will also be establishing a shrub team to tackle overgrown shrubs on Council land, plus also the removal of any litter in the shrub beds. This team will be operational from the beginning of April.

### **Waste and Recycling**

One of the main environmental campaigns in 2022/23 will involve colleagues from Environment and from Communications and Engagement highlighting the significant impact of food waste. The team is developing a communications campaign around food waste minimisation and donating what we do not need to use, to community organisations such as Food Banks. UK households waste 6.5 million tonnes of food waste every year, 4.5 million of which is edible. National research shows that a family of four can save just over £60 per month by reducing their food waste.

The Council undertook a waste analysis across Blackburn with Darwen in October 2021, the analysis showed that 44% of the waste in the burgundy bins was food waste, of which half was still edible and in date.

Food waste is a problem for the environment, it affects climate change and reducing it would save households a substantial amount of money. Food takes a lot of energy to grow and cultivate, plus, when placed in bins, it ultimately uses energy to dispose of it.

## REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH & WELLBEING

**COUNCILLOR DAMIAN TALBOT**

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING  
DIRECTORS: DOMINIC HARRISON &  
MARTIN EDEN  
DATE: 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

### **PUBLIC HEALTH**

The Targeted Lung Health Checks (TLHC) programme is a new and ground-breaking flagship programme of work in England which targets those most at risk of lung cancer and will initially work with CCGs who have some of the highest rates of mortality from lung cancer. Blackburn with Darwen is one of the initial ten pilot sites for the programme and people aged over 55 years old but less than 75 years old that have ever smoked have been invited for a free lung check. Following the lung health check those assessed as high risk were offered a low dose CT scan on the mobile unit at Ewood Park with 523 scans completed in the first phase of the programme. The Public Health Tobacco Control Lead participated in the programme promoting the Stop Smoking Service through attendance at the scanning sessions developing signposting and referral pathways to support the following public health outcomes:

- Smoking Prevalence in Adults
- Smokers that have successfully quit at 4 Weeks
- Smoking attributable mortality & hospital admissions

### **Eat Well Move More Strategy**

On Friday 11th March the Eat Well Move More strategy was launched with 60 partners and stakeholders at Ewood Park. The event included keynote speeches from Professor Dominic Harrison, Director of Public Health and Tina Pilkington from Sport England. There were also real stories highlighting the work of the Food Resilience Alliance and Active Network members connected to food and physical activity in the borough. There were a number of interactive and engaging workshops which will help to direct the work of the refreshed strategy in ensuring food and physical supports our recovery from the pandemic and supports the physical and mental health of our community.

### **Fizz Free February**

Public Health have been working with the BwD Food Resilience Alliance to run the borough's first 'Fizz Free February' across Blackburn with Darwen. The campaign aims to encourage people to give up sugary pop and replace it with water or milk to help reduce tooth decay and also to reduce sugar intake which impacts on weight. Promotion took place on the digital screens and in Children's Centres and schools across Blackburn with Darwen. Blackburn Rovers Community Trust have started delivering the Give Up Loving Pop (GULP) campaign in primary across the borough and will be supporting a poster competition to promote good oral health in readiness for the Oral Health Improvement strategy launch in May.

## **LIBRARIES**

Borough residents will benefit from longer library opening hours in response to the Council's renewed commitment to boosting community health and wellbeing and providing free access to WiFi, computers and digital resources. From the beginning of May, Blackburn Central Library will extend opening times until 4pm on Saturdays and Darwen Library will increase its Wednesday hours, open all day from 10am to 5pm. The extended hours will allow for an enhanced programme of community activities for all ages. In addition to the existing range of e-books, e-audio books, e-magazines and online information services, library members can now also access an extended suite of digital offers for free from any internet-connected device, including free online newspapers, a music download and streaming service, a language learning programme, and for younger users, a revolutionary story telling experience.

## **LEISURE**

The Council continues to recognise the importance and health and wellbeing benefits of encouraging people to move more and include physical activity in everyday lives. In 2008 Blackburn with Darwen launched its innovative re:refresh programme, open to anyone living or working in the borough, in full time education or with a BwD GP. To support the recovery of residents and the borough from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, from April 1st the Council is investing in a 12 month programme of free leisure sessions across the borough. This will include a variety of activities including gym-based, swimming and cycling sessions. The full programme will be available on the re:refresh website ([www.refreshbwd.com](http://www.refreshbwd.com)) **here**.

In addition to the above sessions, the Public Health team are also exploring opportunities to expand this free offer into other community facilities and provide more targeted sessions to specific groups within our population. The aim of this is to tackle health inequalities by working with people who we know have done less physical activity throughout the pandemic. Both programmes will support the aims of the recently launched BwD Eat Well Move More Strategy, to work with partners to improve access to good food and create opportunities for residents to be more physically active.

## **ARTS AND HERITAGE**

**Turton Tower** will reopen weekend of 26/27 March with a full weekend of events planned to celebrate the doors opening for the first time in 2 years. This includes many who have used the grounds throughout the pandemic to rehearse or as a meeting point such as the band The Grumpy Old Men and the Military Vehicle Trust. There will also be talks from local authors and volunteers including Peter Farley (garden volunteer and author of the Ghosts of Turton Tower) and Mark Paterson local footballer with his autobiography. Performances from the Regency dancers and Silver Swords. The Tower will then be open for the season 11 -4 Wednesday to Sunday each week until October.

**Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery's** latest exhibition is the Monochrome Museum which brings to together a diverse mix of items from the collection from art to telephones which are black white and grey. The exhibition is open alongside the rest of the Museum Wednesday to Saturday 12-4 until May 21s.

## **VENUES**

Venues continue to recover well in King George's Hall's centenary year with a varied programme and strong ticket sales for comedians, music and family entertainment. Recent sell outs include Chris Ramsey and Nish Kumar. It is also good to see schools returning to enjoy live shows; after the success of last year's pantomime the Pinocchio Ballet performances have already sold over 500 school tickets.



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

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING DIRECTORS:  
KATHERINE WHITE (ADULT SOCIAL CARE & PREVENTION)**

**DATE: 24 March 2022**

### **Funding to support local people improve their employability**

Since July 2020, the Neighbourhoods, Wellbeing and Prevention Service has delivered the More Positive Together (MPT) project for Blackburn with Darwen as part of a Lancashire-wide project in partnership with Active Lancashire. The MPT project provides local people with one-to-one support to help boost their confidence, improve their skills and wellbeing and to help them to move closer to employment. Residents from some of the most deprived areas and with challenging life circumstances have been supported to access training, work placements and employment opportunities, with some excellent outcomes. Listen to Raheem tell his story via video: <https://theshuttle.org.uk/more-funding-to-support-unemployed-people-back-into-work/>

The MPT project, funded by the European Social Fund, has secured a further two years of funding along with additional funding for the MPT Steps project which aims to support people who have become unemployed during to the pandemic.

### **The Adult Learning Service remains 'Good' - as judged by Ofsted**

The Adult Learning team was inspected by Ofsted in November 2021 and retained its 'Good' rating for the fourth time. The Inspectors highlighted the great work carried out since the last inspection, including addressing all actions taken to resolve the previous areas for improvement. The service was also commended for its Long Covid peer support course, set up in response to local need.

Throughout the pandemic the service has continued to adapt and flex, incorporating a new remote offer to ensure learners were supported both online and in person. Maintaining a 'Good' Ofsted rating can be difficult as the framework and standards evolve, but to do it after such a period of uncertainty was particularly pleasing.

The service offers a range of accredited and non-accredited short courses, funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). Each year, the service helps around 2,700 people complete courses and benefit from the holistic approach to developing the skills and behaviours needed to increase their employability, improve family life, and improve health and wellbeing.

Courses focus on employability, health and wellbeing, ICT and digital, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and family learning.

The inspection report included: 'Learners are motivated to achieve their goals and improve their lives. They enjoy their programmes and are proud of the progress they make.'

The service will use the findings outlined in the Ofsted report to identify further opportunities to build on the 'Good' rating and continue to develop the offer to ensure residents are given the support they need.

## **Adult Social Care**

Adult Social Care, including Specialist Services (Learning Disability & Autism, Mental Health, Emergency Duty Team and Safeguarding) have seen an increased demand in terms of referrals into services. Safeguarding Adults, Applications to the Court of Protection, Corporate Appointee and requests for statutory Social Care assessments have all seen increases in activity. Where possible, the teams connect residents to local neighbourhood and prevention services alongside commissioning formal packages of care.

Our recently submitted Annual Safeguarding Adults Board report highlights that compared to last year, there has been a significant increase in safeguarding adult concerns received by the duty team. It is felt that this is in some part as a result of the impact of the Pandemic both in terms of population health and wellbeing and also increased awareness and reporting as restrictions are eased. The response to this increase has included additional activity, oversight and monitoring by social workers, professionals and wider carers. Adult Safeguarding is the responsibility of us all and the increased demand has required a collaborative response from across the adult social care teams who have ensured that our statutory responsibilities are met and vulnerable adults are protected from harm.

Social workers continue to be key members of the Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INT) and support the development and maintenance of positive working relationships with practitioners from across the whole of the Health, Care and the Community sector. The INTs ensure the provision and coordination of health, social care and community support to individuals. Increasing numbers of referrals into the INTs demonstrate the confidence that people have in this being a pathway to achieving positive outcomes for individuals and their families. People's needs are addressed through strength and asset based approaches to social care assessment. Collaborative working between Community Connectors and the Adult Social Care teams has seen better outcomes for individual service users and increased signposting to community assets. In terms of statutory care and support, increased review activity has positively contributed to both promoting independence and resource management, ensuring the right support at the right time for our most vulnerable residents.

Our new Intermediate Care facility at Albion Mill opened its doors to residents during January this year. This followed on from the opening of the Extra Care part of the scheme on 29th November 2021. We have seen a good take up of the Extra Care apartments with new people moving in on an ongoing basis. Although opening with a phased approach, our Intermediate Care service has already successfully supported a number of residents through their rehab programme and seen them return home with greater independence. Additionally, the Community Hub within the scheme is already busy and hosting a variety of activities both for residents of the scheme and the wider neighbourhood. There are several organisations providing services from within Albion Mill and all are working collaboratively to

address any difficulties associated with the opening of such a big scheme and to provide the best possible care and support to residents.

### **Strategic Commissioning & Finance**

Significant demands on the Care Sector continued throughout the winter months, in part due to rising Covid cases associated with the omicron variant. The number of large outbreaks in care homes and across our care providers increased significantly during December and January with almost all our homes facing an outbreak of scale during this time. Our Care Providers have consistently adhered to infection, prevention and control measures to manage outbreaks of Covid whilst the Care Sector Response Group continues to provide support, advice and daily reports. The Covid situation is now consistently improving across the sector as we see more of our providers move out of outbreak status. That said, the market remains fragile as some providers are struggling to return to previous occupancy levels and some are struggling to recruit a full care workforce. The Commissioning and Finance team are working closely with all providers across the sector to finalise the provider fee levels for 2022/23.

A new Market Sustainability and Fair Funding Grant has been allocated to Councils for 2022/23 which is intended to fund activity to:

- conduct a fair cost of care exercise to determine the sustainable rates for care and identify how close the Council are to these sustainable rates;
- engage with our providers to improve data on operational costs and the number of self-funders to better understand the impact of social care reform on the local market.

### **Changing Future Programme**

The Changing Futures programme, led by Blackburn with Darwen Council on behalf of the county region has started in earnest. Pennine is the first sub region of Lancashire to begin working with clients, with 50 referrals received in the first 4 weeks from people suffering multiple disadvantage i.e. homelessness, substance misuse, poor mental health, domestic abuse and contact with the criminal justice system. Once a referral is received it will be discussed by the team who meet daily to review new referrals. Where a referral is accepted the case is allocated to a Lived Experience worker. Where a referral is not accepted the case will be signposted to an appropriate service to meet the identified needs. The Lived Experience worker supports the individual through their support journey, navigating them through the array of services we have available. With a single plan built with the individual and bespoke to their needs, we can already see the positive effect on some of our most vulnerable resident's lives. The programme is proving particularly effective alongside our homelessness provision as we maintain our offer of accommodation to all, to include the council run homelessness prevention pods.



## REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR DIGITAL AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

**COUNCILLOR QUESIR MAHMOOD**

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING  
CHIEF OFFICERS: Strategic Director  
of Resources (SIRO)  
Thursday, 24 March 2022**

### **COUNCIL: Delivered by a strong and resilient council;**

#### **Resilience and Emergency Planning**

The Resilience & Emergency Planning Service (R&EP Service) has remained in place, coordinated with partners, since March 2020 responding to Covid and recently provided support during the Omicron surge. Moving forwards the team will be supporting internally with a post incident review.

Whilst BwD has been in this response mode we have also responded to Storm Arwen, Dudley, Eunice and Electricity Power Outages, water leaks, flooding affecting highways, and building fires with vulnerable residents. Multi Agency teleconferences were stepped up during the storms to support Lancashire response and resources.

We have refreshed the training package to deliver to school improvement groups, to complement the new SLA package from the Resilience Service. This is now live and available to purchase on the Services for Schools website.

#### **Duty Officer Statistics – Quarter 3 2021/2022**

Information received	115
Warning total	196
Total:	311
Strategic Officer Activations	1
Duty Officer Activations	11

#### **Digital Strategy**

Capital investment for the Digital Strategy was approved at Finance Council in February. This will deliver further transformation through increased use of digital forms for residents, improved back office requesting as well as upgrading the Council's core ICT Network. Procurement is now underway for moving our IT infrastructure to the Cloud and for the introduction of a unified communications platform to replace the legacy telephony system. Work to improve the digital skills of the workforce is underway with a refreshed digital champions scheme to be launched in the spring.

#### **Customer Services**

The recruitment of a number of new members of staff is underway and it is hoped that they will be in place by the start of April 2022.

The team are supporting residents through annual Council Tax and Benefits processes, as well as providing support to residents around the national Council Tax rebate initiative, recently announced by the Government.

#### **IT Services**

The team continue to support and manage the Council's critical IT systems and infrastructure. Compared to pre-pandemic, levels of demand for IT services and equipment has increased as the Council has adapted and transformed services. With a number of current vacancies, recruitment of specialist technology skills is proving

challenging due to a competitive technology labour market. As a result we have increased activities to train and develop our own staff, including supporting a number of apprentice roles in hard to fill, specialist areas. We have also recently partnered with HOST Skills City to promote specialist technology training opportunities for local people who are unemployed, underemployed and from underrepresented groups, with a launch event hosted in The Making Rooms.

### **Digital Customer Portal**

The final Waste processes have now been successfully moved to the new Digital Customer Portal (DCP). Plans are now in place to decommission the legacy system which is a significant milestone in the DCP project and in maintaining integrity and security of IT systems. We now have 135 total number of resident and business processes live on DCP with 65,608 online customer accounts now live. The second phase of DCP is planned, where we will continue to transform and digitise processes and services.

The Digital team were selected, alongside Cumbria County Council and Kent Fire & Rescue, as one of three national finalists for the IESE UK Public Sector Transformation Awards in the Customer Focus category. Recognised for our work in Service Design and Customer Research, the entry demonstrated the Council's continued progress in delivering improved digital services for residents. We're pleased to announce that BwD picked up the Silver award. This is the second year running that the Digital Team have won a national IESE award, after collecting the Gold prize in 2021 for Digital Transformation.

### **Business Intelligence**

The Business Intelligence team are currently developing a Data Strategy for the Council working with a commercial partner. This will provide a framework for how the Council will use data going forward, with the ultimate aim of increasing proactive interventions to support vulnerable individuals and families. As such, work is continuing to bring new data feeds into our data warehouse, enabling the Council to provide a more consistent view of customer requests and interactions. The team provided significant support to the Council's recent Ofsted inspection in Children's Services.

### **Information Governance and Security (inc GDPR)**

There have been no information assurance incidents warranting referral to the ICO during quarter 3. In the same period we have achieved the minimum requirement for statutory compliance in the following areas;

- Freedom of Information 95.57%
- Environmental Information Regulation 96.58%.
- GDPR/Data Protection Act 2018 Subject Access Requests (SARs) 93.44%
- Mandatory Information Governance Training 97.59%.

The team have increased monitoring and communications around Cyber Security as a result of developments in Russia and Ukraine.

### **Organisational Development (OD)**

The team are currently reviewing the OD & Workforce Strategy with key leads across the organisation. A benchmarking exercise of where the Council is now has been undertaken and the review will take account of what works well in order to refresh and rebrand the OD Strategy.

Key themes have been identified and this includes a review of the culture, behaviour framework and the values. The whole workforce has been engaged to maximise involvement from different departments as part of developing an 'employee voice' group to inform the work.

The employee voice group are currently attending workshops to shape what a revised behaviour and culture framework should look like. Feedback will be taken from the workshops over the next month, which will inform revision of the strategy.

## **PEOPLE: A good quality of life for all our residents;**

### **Advice Services**

The number of customer contacts for debt and welfare benefits advice has increased in the past few months. Debt and Welfare contact is on average up by 10%, in addition, there has also been an increase in the number of housing cases which are up by 7% on previous periods.

A more recent trend has been the number of people who are accessing the service due to fuel poverty. Whilst the initial reason will be listed as fuel poverty, case work invariably uncovers multiple issues being experienced by the clients.

### **Registrars**

To limit unnecessary contact during the pandemic, the process of death registration moved from a face to face appointment, to a telephone call appointment. This change was always seen as a temporary solution, and is due to end on 24<sup>th</sup> of March 2022. Appropriate updates will be made to the web site to ensure all customers are aware of the change and the new procedure.

In a drive to digitise the service and enhance customer options, an online booking procedure for birth registrations has been developed and tested, with imminent deployment planned . Once this has been completed and there has been a period of live running, it is proposed that death registrations are also offered via the web.

### **Website Accessibility**

Over the past 12 months continual improvement work has been carried out to make the Council's website Blackburn.gov.uk more accessible for residents. Our approaches follow national gov.uk standards and our team is part of a small national network of Council's who are innovating and sharing accessible, open source web design approaches. We have worked with our customer panel in delivering this improved accessibility. Improvements have included better accessibility for people with visual impairment.

## REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

**COUNCILLOR VICKY MCGURK**

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING  
CHIEF OFFICER: Director of Finance,  
Dean Langton, Thursday, 24 March  
2022**

### **PEOPLE: A good quality of life for all our residents;**

#### **Revenues and Benefits**

##### **Business Rates**

The main focus for the Business Rates team is the preparation and completion of the annual billing process. This year again has changes to the amount many businesses will pay, particularly in respect of the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors.

In addition to annual billing work, the team continues to contact and support businesses with the new Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant. This grant has been aimed at hospitality, leisure and accommodation businesses, in recognition that the Omicron variant would have a direct impact on their ability to operate. All potential qualifying businesses are being contacted by email or letter.

The administration of a new Covid Additional Relief Fund (CARF) is also underway. This relief looks to assess businesses who have been adversely affected by the Covid pandemic but not previously been eligible for the Extended Retail Discount. The Business Rate team is contacting all potential qualifying businesses advising them of the criteria, and, asking for applications to be made. Once all applications have been received and assessed, a percentage relief will be awarded to the business rates bill of those successful applicants.

##### **Council Tax and Benefits**

The Council Tax team is also preparing for the annual billing of all Council Tax properties in the borough. Whilst the customer response to the issuing of the bills is always very high, it is anticipated that the current cost of living worries may increase the number of calls and visits from customers.

The Government has also announced a series of measures to mitigate the rising cost of energy bills. Whilst very little detail has been made available at the time of writing, included in the measures is a one-off payment of £150 per household to Council Tax payers living in houses that are in tax bands A to D. A discretionary scheme will also operate for those in bands E – H and other eligible residents.

Further details will be issued to members once the Government guidance has been received.

### **COUNCIL: Delivered by a strong and resilient council;**

#### **Financial Services**

Work is continuing alongside External Audit to finalise the 2020-21 statement of accounts, timescales have been impacted by the pandemic but it is anticipated that this work will be finalised imminently. External Audit are also currently undertaking an assessment of the Council's value for money arrangements



Work on the development of the budget for 2022/23 has been completed with the revenue budget 2022-23, the capital programme and the Financial Strategy 2022-2025 presented to Finance Council on the 28 February.

The financial impact of the pandemic continues to be monitored with returns completed monthly to government departments on our additional expenditure, income losses and various grant funding streams such as Contain Outbreak Management Fund etc.

The general impact of the pandemic is that aspects of the normal financial cycle are starting to merge; as indicated above, the sign-off of the Council's Statement of Accounts for 2020/21 is almost complete but this has cut across the work on the development of the Council's Budget for 2022/23. Due to this, preparatory work on the closure of the accounts for 2021/22 has been delayed and whilst it is not expected to impact on the deadline for the production of the draft Statement of Accounts, it will require some intensive work during the first quarter of the new financial year.

### **Audit & Assurance**

Progress in delivering the 2021/22 Annual Audit Plan will be reported to the March Audit & Governance Committee meeting. The report will summarise the internal audit outcomes achieved to the end of February. It will also include an update on the progress of work to follow up the data matches highlighted from the latest National Fraud Initiative exercise, led by the Cabinet Office. In addition, the draft 2022/23 annual internal audit and three year strategic plans will be presented for approval. The annual plan sets out the work that the Audit & Assurance Team will carry out during 2022/23 to support the Section 151 Officer's statutory obligations to maintain an adequate and effective internal audit of the Council's accounting records and systems of internal control, governance and risk management and to provide the Head of Audit's Annual Internal Audit Report for 2022/23.

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

### **Corporate Procurement and Contracts**

The Contracts and Procurement team have been working on a number of tenders with departments including for Security Services, Home to School transport, CCTV staffing, Teams Rooms, IT Equipment, Traffic Management and Litter Enforcement. The team have also supported colleagues in Commissioning and Public Health teams in relation to the evaluation and award of the Substance Misuse contract and advising on plans for the 0-19 contract. Legal officers in the team have been helping to prepare a variety of legal agreements for various matters including grant funding agreements and contracts to support the above matters.

### **HR Services**

The priorities for the service remain focussed on supporting the organisation to recover from Covid – 19, the implementation of the new HR & Payroll system and delivering services to our schools.

The first phase of the system is complete and the implementation will now focus on all end users accessing the system and using its full functionality and implementing additional modules including on boarding, learning, development, performance, case management and health and safety system.

The team are also supporting the delivery of an OD programme, which will focus on four workstreams: culture & values, recruitment & retention, health & wellbeing and leadership & management development.

The service will also support this year's apprentice programme to recruit new candidates for September 2022.

### **Legal & Governance Services**

The Litigation Team conducted a complex prosecution case of the two owners of a business trading as Smak Polski which came about after trading standards officers seized packs of counterfeit and illegally packaged cigarettes with a retail value £177 500. Both defendants were sentenced at Preston Crown Court on 4 February 2022. The owner of Smak Polski, pleaded guilty to nine offences relating to the supply of illicit tobacco, including fraudulent trading. They both received suspended prison sentences of 12 months with requirements to undertake unpaid work and rehabilitation activities. The proceeds of their crimes will be pursued at a later hearing.

The Governance team are making preparations for the local elections on 5 May and the count on 6 May at King Georges Hall. The elections will be for seats on the 17 Blackburn with Darwen wards and 'all out' elections for Eccleshill Parish Council and Yate & Pickup Bank Parish Council. The team are working to the statutory timetable and the Notice of Election will be published on Friday 25 March 2022. The team and the elections preparation work will take place from the 2nd floor, Town Hall, again.

The team have also been implementing the use of the new Audio Visual system in the Council Chamber, with the phased introduction of the microphone, webcasting and voting elements of the new system. The use of the system will continue to be extended for wider use, such as presentations/training, coroner's inquest hearings and 'hybrid' meetings.

## REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

**COUNCILLOR PHIL RILEY**

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING  
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR: MARTIN KELLY  
DATE: 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

### **ALL PRIORITIES:**

#### **New Local Plan to 2037**

The final draft of the new Local Plan was published for a 6-week public consultation on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2022, ending on 18<sup>th</sup> March. The ambitious Plan proposes the creation of around 7,000 new homes and 5,000 net new jobs by 2037 at identified development sites.

It also aims to help drive the Borough's Covid-19 recovery by supporting housing and employment growth, and improved social and physical infrastructure as well as ways to combat climate change in all planning decisions.

Following the consultation, the responses will be reviewed and submitted to Government for examination, subject to Council Forum approval. The Government requires Local Plans to be adopted by the end of 2023.

### **PLACE, PRIORITY 4: CONNECTED COMMUNITIES**

#### **Local Transport Plan – Annual Improvements Programme**

Following confirmation on 28<sup>th</sup> February of our funding allocations for 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25, with the 2022/23 improvement programme considered at the March meeting of the Executive Board. The funding has remained at 2021/22 levels with a balanced improvement programme across all our assets.

#### **Cycling and Walking**

In December, the Council was notified that we had been successful with our request to be considered as part of an Active Travel Social Prescribing feasibility study. Our transport team are working in conjunction with Public Health colleagues to develop a bid and the study will provide funding to enable the Council to work with in collaboration with NHS colleagues to develop project plans that will:

- Actively promote increased levels of physical activity through cycling and walking
- Demonstrate clear links between infrastructure development and the proposed social prescribing schemes
- Support a modal shift to active travel providing people with travel choices and supporting changes in behaviour

Our bid will be submitted in April and if successful funding will be provided over the next 3 years.

## **Enhanced Bus Partnership**

In October, the Council published its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) which was created in conjunction with Lancashire County Council and our private operators. The BSIP analyses current service levels and includes targets to:

- improve bus journey time and reliability; and
- increase passenger numbers and customer satisfaction.

We have completed all statutory consultation and due to the delay in the Department for Transport (DfT) announcing funding allocations the decision to enter into an Enhanced Partnership with our private operators in April 2022, will be delayed until consideration by the Executive Board in April.

## **PLACE, PRIORITY 5: SAFE & CLEAN ENVIRONMENT**

### **Safer Roads Operational Group and Strategy**

The new Safer Roads Strategy was approved at February Executive Board and aims to encourage safer but also healthier roads. The primary aim of this strategy is to reduce casualties on the Borough's roads and its secondary aims are to:

- Make people feel safer on BwD roads, including when walking and cycling;
- Reduce car use and increase in walking and cycling; and
- Take action to improve air quality.

We have established an operational multi-agency group to work within the strategic framework of engagement, education, enforcement, and engineering and developed a comprehensive 5-year action plan.

In addition the Council works in partnership with strategic partners across the Lancashire sub-region as part of the Lancashire Roads Safety Partnership. This group is in a transitional period with the strategy and terms of reference being reviewed. The partnership has a crucial role in enforcement, education and engaging over road safety and having our own strategy linked to the aims of this partnership will be beneficial.

### **Climate Emergency Action Plan**

The Council's Executive Board approved the latest update to the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) in December 2021. As agreed, a Climate Change Working Group has been formed to provide oversight of the delivery of actions set out in the CEAP. The Working Group includes representatives from across all Council service areas and is co-chaired at the Director level. The working group will focus, prioritise and track the impact of key CEAP actions. An annual report on the delivery of CEAP priorities will be presented to members.

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

### **Darwen Town Deal**

Work is well underway on the development of the detailed business cases for the 9 approved projects in the £25 million Darwen Town Deal allocation to help deliver the Town Investment Plan. These business cases will be submitted to Government by early August after approval by the Town Deal Board and Council, as accountable body. A Communication and Marketing strategy is being developed with the Board and there will be regular updates on progress as well as further information on the direction of the development of the projects. All funding will be allocated in line with Government requirements and our programme management and assurance frameworks. The Council, as the accountable body, will be responsible for the delivery of the programme over the 4-year funding period including the current pre-development phase working to the Town Deal Board. A more detailed report on the Darwen Deal programme was presented to March Executive Board.

### **Housing Developments**

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

- Keepmoat and Progress Housing have submitted a detailed planning application 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.
- Following outline planning permission being granted in 2021 for up to 165 new homes at Whalley Old Road, a partially Council-owned site, an informal tender process has been carried out and a preferred developer will be recommended to the Executive Board meeting in April to take the site forward via a detailed planning application later this year.
- Tenders for the development of the Holden Fold residential development site in Darwen (former Moorland School site), which is partly Council-owned, are to be invited during Spring 2022.

Other developments on 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, the Mill Hill sites where Great Places are developing, land at Lomond Gardens for McDermott Homes, and Countryside Homes and Together Housing have now commenced their development of 390 new homes of mixed tenure around Fishmoor Drive / Roman Road.

Elan Homes will soon be commencing their residential development at Milking Lane, Lower Darwen, which the Council owns as part of the Barnfield Blackburn Ltd Joint Venture.

In Darwen, McDermott Homes have commenced their development at Ellison Fold Way in Darwen which 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.

### **Commercial Developments**

Good progress is continuing to be made at the Milking Lane development site, which the Council is bringing forward as part of the Barnfield Blackburn Joint Venture Company. The new link road through the site opened in 2021 and construction of the commercial development plots commenced this month.

At Carl Fogarty Way, preferred bidders have been selected for Plots 1, 4 and 6. Planning permission was granted for the commercial development of Plot 1 in February, and planning applications are now under assessment for commercial developments at Plots 4 and 6. Plot 3 is to be released for tender soon.

### **PLACE, PRIORITY 7: SUPPORTING OUR TOWN CENTRES AND BUSINESSES**

The Council / Maple Grove Joint Venture company is continuing to progress with ambitious masterplanning work for the former Thwaites Brewery site and surrounds in Blackburn Town Centre, with details published as part of the current Local Plan public consultation. Demolition of a vacant building adjacent to The Fleece Public House commenced in February, in preparation for future renovation and re-opening of The Fleece.

Specialist architects, OMI, were appointed in February to commence the St John's Church refurbishment and repurposing project in Blackburn Town Centre, aimed at creating high quality flexible workspace to meet new agile working trends post pandemic. A planning application for the works is anticipated in late 2022, with contractor procurement commencing early 2023.

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

As a precautionary measure, prior to recent and exceptionally strong winds and storms, the pavement and road was temporarily closed to the front of Blakey Moor Terrace. A package of temporary works advised by our structural engineer and Building Control is being undertaken to ensure the safety of the building. Pedestrian access has been maintained to King George's Hall and the road closure will be lifted as soon as possible.

These works will not affect the programmed restoration and redevelopment of the terrace that will be onsite for the next 12 months.

Phase II internal refurbishment of 35 Northgate (former Ribblesdale Hotel) are currently onsite, with a new bar and restaurant operator hopeful of being ready to open by June.

Shop front restoration schemes for properties at 13 Northgate (former Age Concern) 34 (Baileys Jewellers) and 36-40 (Wellcome pound shop) Northgate have been tendered and we hope to award grant funding in the next few months.

**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION  
COUNCILLOR JULIE GUNN  
PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING  
DIRECTOR: JAYNE IVORY  
DATE: 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

## **Schools and Education**

The Education response team have continued to support all our schools and settings throughout the borough this term. From Monday 7<sup>th</sup> March, we will be scaling back the Education response team and this has been communicated to all Headteachers. The change reflects the reduction in cases being reported by schools, the phasing out of testing at the end of the month, and the updated operational guidance for schools. It recognises that schools are confident in dealing with the day to day challenges as we all begin to live with Covid-19. The Education response team will continue to support schools and settings albeit in a reduced way.

Current attendance as of week beginning 21<sup>st</sup> February 2022 remain higher than national average for all pupils, pupils with and EHCP and generally in line with national average for children with a social worker.

Ofsted inspections continue this term Newfield's report has been published, moving from Outstanding to Requires Improvement. St Stephen's CE Blackburn, Darwen St Peter's CE and Sacred Heart have all been inspected and we await final reports.

Steve Munby, Visiting Professor at University College London, Centre for Educational Leadership, has been commissioned to Chair the School Improvement Board. Initially he will conduct a review of the Future of School Improvement in Blackburn with Darwen and the future role of the School Improvement Partnership Board. This review is timely as Government will publish its Education White Paper this year and the Local Authority School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant will be halved from April 2022 and will end completely in April 2023. After several years of functioning and in the light of a new and emerging national agenda, the Board agreed that now is a good time to step back and review the future of the Blackburn with Darwen School Improvement Partnership. Steve will conduct one-to-one interviews with the key people in Blackburn with Darwen, eg Director of Children's Services, Executive Member for Children's Services, CEOs of Multi-Academy Trusts, Regional Schools Commissioner, SIG head teachers, Deputy Director for Education and Schools, Leaders of Teaching School Hubs. He will then produce a report which summarises the issues and suggests some ways forward. The report will be discussed at a special meeting of the School Improvement Partnership Board on 30th June with a view to launching the new way of working, if appropriate, in the autumn of 2022. Days for conducting the review: 17th and 18th May.

Blackburn with Darwen with support from the boroughs Secondary School sector have made 2239 offers of Year 7 places for September 2022:

Number of children in offered their first preference secondary school	1733
Number of children in offered their second preference secondary school	263
Number of children in offered their third preference secondary school	97
Number of children in offered a no preference secondary school	146

Blackburn with Darwen has agreed to take part in a 'pilot' of the Annual Conversation with OFSTED. This entails rather than a single meeting, a number of single conversations taking place for:  
Early Years  
Schools  
SEND and Children in our care  
Post 16.

We have hosted three of these meetings this term. They have been productive meetings of sharing the excellent work taking place in BwD, whilst also making the challenges we face clear to OFSTED.

## **SEND**

Late November Blackburn with Darwen council and CCG took part in a pilot 'methodology testing' with OFSTED and CQC.

*The purpose of the Methodology Testing was to:*

- Test out some new ways to gather evidence about the way children and young people with SEND are supported
- Provide the inspectorates with valuable information about how well possible new approaches work in practice and help them to identify where further improvements or thinking is needed.
- 

As this was not an inspection there is no formal report to share. However OFSTED and CQC gave some feedback regarding positive practices within BwD. The team also indicated two areas for the local area to look at in further depth. The process lasted three weeks with all meetings taking place virtually. The methodology testing provided an insight into future local area inspections and gave opportunities for the council and CCG to test our Self Evaluation.

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

As reported on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2022, the number of Children in our Care is 388. CP Plans is 101 and CIN 268

Our recent data that our re-referral rate remains categorised as lower than the regional and national average. This indicates that from the front door Children's Advice and Duty Service the right children are progressing as referrals for assessment which then determine the most appropriate planning to safeguard or support the children within our borough. We have introduced bi weekly multi agency reviews of contacts and referrals through the front door to increase our scrutiny of these and to support continuous improvements.

Children in Need plans have remained steady over the past 6 months – 268 currently compared to 250 at the end of July 2021. Our children subject to child protection plans has decreased from 152 to 101 over the same period.

Since July 2021, there has been an increase in the number of children becoming looked after for some of the reasons accounted for above. Our current cohort of children subject to interim care orders pending final outcomes from court proceedings is 84. This compares to 63 at the end of July 2021.

From November 2021 we have been piloting Systemic Teams which focus on children and families having one social worker/team manager from the front door up until a plan of permanence is achieved. For many this will mean step down or closure but for the minority this will mean retaining children through care proceedings to determine final legal permanence when, for some, the care plan may be one of adoption or them remaining looked after more longer term. This model is in its infancy, but appears to be embedded well, with weekly review of impact taking place. This way of working is also upskilling our workforce and offering a broader experience in child care social work for our staff. Evaluation of this pilot will be fully explored in six months' time.

## **Corporate Parenting**

As previously stated there has been an increase in the numbers of Cared for Children in the borough which has been a proportionate response to the circumstances of risk that children and young people are experiencing in their families. We have an embedded and timely response to ensure where possible children and young people remain with their extended family members during this period with support from the Permanence Team. This in turn means that children and young people are likely to minimise change in terms of education and health professionals that know them.



The theme around embedding the Corporate Parenting Strategy continues with the Strategy on a Page being aligned with the training for members and partner agencies, to assist with easy reference and remain mindful of our pledges.

## **ADOLESCENT SERVICES**

### **Engage Service**

The team are planning to deliver a briefing to all Members in the New Year following a positive piece of work around neighbourhood mapping, which is helping to inform an understanding of contextual risks to young people in respect of the places and spaces where they spend time. The mapping exercise is providing valuable intel in supporting a multi-agency approach to disruption and prevention. Engage are planning several events as part of County Lines Intensification Week, which runs from 7th March, to increase understanding of child criminal exploitation and how this impacts young people within Blackburn with Darwen. This includes awareness raising to communities, parents and carers, Police, supported housing and youth groups, and several workshops for staff across Children's Services. Awareness raising events have also been arranged for young people, and the team is working in partnership with a local gym to provide a programme of support for groups of young people vulnerable to exploitation. We continue to develop our joint working with other members of Adolescent Services, with TYS now completing detached work to areas where Engage believe young people may face contextual risks.

### **The SEEDS – Adolescent Support Unit**

The SEEDS service has continued to support vulnerable families and young people over the Christmas period. Holiday and family time can be a difficult period for families to manage, hence there has been a collective response to ensure families and children are supported effectively.

Adolescent services have supported the SEEDS and Lytham Road Children's Homes to manage staffing capacity impacted by sickness, demand and Covid. The Deputy Manager and the Principal Adolescent Support Team Worker are working towards Systemic training in both 'Systemic Social Work Practice' and 'Leadership and Management training'. Even though they have yet to complete this training we are now starting to embed aspects of systemic practice at The SEEDS.

Recently the SEEDs have provided emergency support to a number of young people. The Seeds provide an ongoing preventative service, providing support to young people and their families to help to avoid a placement breakdown. The service continues to contribute hugely within a multi-agency approach to provide practical help and support for young people and families who are struggling in times of crisis.

### **Youth Justice Service**

The Youth Justice Service (YJS) are currently developing a joint post to sit alongside the Engage team, initially as a fixed term contract. This would improve links between services to support and intervene with young people identified as possibly becoming involved in criminality that may be underpinned by exploitative influences, in the hope of preventing them from being criminalised. Plans for the post have been put forward to Workforce Management for approval.

The YJS are also developing conversations with Lancashire and South Cumbria Foundation Trust (LSCFT) to obtain Speech and Language support for young people open to the YJS, an issue widely acknowledged as prevalent for both children and adults within the criminal justice system. It is hoped that acquiring this service will improve children and young people's journey, to better understand and navigate their way through the system, and equip them to avoid returning through reoffending. Headlines for the YJS are that since the New Year, the service has worked closely with the custodial estate to support three young people transition into adult services. Two of those have turned 18 years of age and moved into the adult custodial estate, however the YJS has retained some

responsibility and involvement with them both to ensure the transition is as smooth and effective as possible and that they are supported through the process. The other individual was released from custody around their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and transferred to the Probation Service upon doing so. A similar approach was taken with the YJS remaining involved following their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and release from custody with the individual and their new Probation Officer, to support this transition.

In February the YJS delivered a training and briefing session to the borough's Foster Carers. The focus of the session was to educate and inform the carers of the function and work of the YJS for when the two worlds, on occasion, overlap. Emphasis was placed on the 'child first, offender second' model and approach taken to the YJS' work, to build resilience and self-esteem for those young people that come into service. Approaches and strategies were explored to how carers can contribute to avoiding the unnecessary criminalisation of young people within the care system and support the young people they care for to help provide the best possible start to life, without the stigmatisation that a criminal record can often bring.

### **Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) Supervision Pilot**

The Designated Safeguarding Lead Supervision pilot continues to be established in the selected primary and secondary schools. The midway feedback is overwhelmingly positive with schools identifying the impact in terms of increased DSL confidence and timely early help interventions for children and young people. This has also been evidenced in the notable reduction in NFA (No Further Action) contacts to CADS. Discussions are ongoing to determine whether this is something that can be maintained once the funding from What Works for Children's Social Care comes to an end in July 2022.

### **Leaving Care Service**

The Leaving Care Service is available to care experienced young people from the age of 16 to 25 years to support and guide young people with their transition to adulthood. The Leaving Care Service works closely with care experienced young people to ensure their voice is heard and they are central to the planning of their future. The Leaving Care service support with a wide range of services to support young people with their education, training, employment, accommodation, financial support alongside supporting and promoting their health and well-being. We are currently developing the Leaving Care Service to ensure all young people aged 16 – 25 years are able to be supported in the best way possible. We are looking forward to the developments of the service and having our care experienced young people participate to help shape the offer and service delivery moving forward.

### **Targeted Youth Support (TYS)**

Current overall caseload of **105** young people across the prevention and intervention teams. We have **21** young people subject to a child protection plan, **42** subject to child in need plan, **40** part of CAF and **2** young people at universal level provision. We continue to provide individually tailored support packages to all TYS young people offering positive activity on a 1:1 and group work basis as a means to address issues identified in the wider plan.

### **YPS - SEND Inclusion Project**

Kaleidoscope youth centre has recently undertaken renovation which includes a brand new sensory room, this will have a positive impact on the children and young people who access our projects.

Additional staff have now been contracted to the term time offer to enable an increase in children and young people who access our weekly provision to meet demand.

### **BwD Youth Forum**

The Youth Elections took place between 24<sup>th</sup> Jan – 4<sup>th</sup> Feb with over 5,000 votes received. The newly elected Youth MP is Muhammed Bapu with Deputies Hasti Jahanghiri and Isabelle Crawford.

Their main campaign issues over the next two years will focus on Mental Health, Child Poverty and Environmental Issues.

The third Strategic Youth Alliance (SYA) Forum took place in February which led to YPS producing a video promoting vaccinations for 12 – 15 year olds. The national Make Your Mark (MYM) referendum took place in February with 7 key issues that affect children and young people nationally. The top 3 for young people in BwD are:

- 1) Jobs, Money, Homes and Opportunities
- 2) Education and Learning
- 3) Health and Wellbeing

### **Voice Groups**

Both the Junior and Senior voice groups met with the Ofsted Inspectors last month at Kaleidoscope Youth Centre providing insight into their projects.

### **Youth Ambassador Programme**

TYS has successfully delivered 2 cohorts of the Youth Ambassador programme over the winter period. Within this delivery we've seen 20 young people take part in 2 activity led team building residentials followed by 4 weekly sessions based around developing knowledge and understanding of religion, culture and diversity in the locality.

### **YPS Detached Project**

Following on from the successes of the COVID Detached project prior to the winter break YPS have led (with the support of commissioned services - BRCT and BYZ) on 3 weekly detached sessions targeting hot spot ASB areas in the locality and following up on information provided by partners in Engage and the Police Force. The aim of the project is to reduce ASB, prevent any potential criminal or sexual exploitation and provide safe, alternative provision through signposting to universal and targeted provision to our third sector partners.

### **YIF Funding Bid**

In February YPS secured £37k worth of funding through the Children In Need Youth Improvement Fund which will see wholesale changes to 3 of our centres offering new, accessible tech and emotional wellbeing improvement opportunities through the development of a wellbeing suite at our Knott Street centre.

### **Duke of Edinburgh (DofE)**

After an extensive period of non-delivery due to COVID restrictions YPS has re-started its DofE Open Award. We currently have a group of 15 registered young people working towards the Bronze and Silver Awards. Young people attend on a twice monthly basis and are developing plans for a Spring expedition.