

Public Document Pack

Executive Board

Thursday, 13 October 2022

Time: 6.00 pm

Venue: Meeting Room A

Address: Blackburn Town Hall

AGENDA

Information may be provided by each Executive Member relating to their area of responsibility

1. **Welcome and Apologies**
2. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**
Executive Board Minutes September 2022 4 - 8
3. **Declarations of Interest**
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FORM 9
4. **Equality Implications**
The Chair will ask Members to confirm that they have considered and understood any Equality Impact Assessments associated with reports on this agenda ahead of making any decisions.
5. **Public Forum**
To receive written questions or statements submitted by members of the public no later than 4pm on the day prior to the meeting.
6. **Questions by Non-Executive Members**
To receive written questions submitted by Non-Executive Members no later than 4pm on the day prior to the meeting.
7. **Youth MPs Update**
To receive an update from the Youth MPs along with any issues they would like to raise.
8. **Executive Member Reports**
Verbal updates may be given by each Executive Member.

Leader

Adults Social Care & Health

8.1	Prevent Local Delivery Prevent Local Delivery	10 - 13
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Children, Young People & Education

8.2	Adoption Annual Report 2021-22 Adoption Annual Report October 2022 Appendix 1 - Adoption Annual Report	14 - 41
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8.3	The Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme The Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme	42 - 46
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Environment & Operations

Public Health, Prevention & Wellbeing

Digital & Customer Services

8.4	Coroner's Service Update EB Coroners update 2021-22	47 - 52
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Growth & Development

Finance & Governance

8.5	Procurement of Advice Services Advice Services	53 - 56
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8.6	Supported Housing Improvement Programme Supported Housing Improvement Programme	57 - 60
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8.7	Update to Medium Term Financial Plan 2025/26 Update of MTFP October 2022 App A-D App E	61 - 79
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9. Corporate Issues

9.1	Land Disposal - Plot 3 - Carl Fogarty Way Disposal of Land P1 Appendix A SITE BOUNDARY PLAN PLOT3 CFW	80 - 86
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10. Matters referred to the Executive Board

**PART 2 – THE PRESS AND PUBLIC MAY BE EXCLUDED DURING
CONSIDERATION OF THE FOLLOWING ITEMS**

**11.1 Land Disposal - Plot 3 - Carl Fogarty Way
Disposal of Land P2**

87 - 92

Date Published: Wednesday, 05 October 2022
Denise Park, Chief Executive

EXECUTIVE BOARD Thursday 8th September 2022

PRESENT

COUNCILLOR:

Councillor Phil Riley
Councillor Julie Gunn
Councillor Jim Smith
Councillor Mahfooz Hussain
Councillor Damian Talbot
Councillor Quesir Mahmood
Councillor Vicky McGurk

PORTFOLIO:

Leader of the Council
Children, Young People and Education
Environment and Operations
Digital and Customer Services
Public Health, Prevention & Wellbeing
Growth & Development
Finance & Governance

EXECUTIVE MEMBER

Councillor John Slater

NON PORTFOLIO

Leader of the Conservative Group

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Muhammed Bapu
Kasim Shah

Youth MP
Deputy Youth MP

	Item	Action
1	<u>Welcome and Apologies</u> The Leader of the Council, Councillor Phil Riley, welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies were received from Councillor Mustafa Desai and Hasti Jahanghiri, Deputy Youth MP.	
2	<u>Minutes of the Previous Meeting</u> The Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 th August 2022 were agreed as a correct record.	Agreed
3	<u>Declarations of Interest</u> No Declarations of Interest were submitted.	
4	<u>Equality Implications</u> The Chair asked Members to confirm that they had considered and understood any Equality Impact Assessments associated with reports on the agenda ahead of making any decisions.	Confirmed
5	<u>Public Forum</u> No questions had been submitted by members of the public.	
6	<u>Questions by Non-Executive Members</u> No questions had been submitted by Non-Executive Members.	

	Item	Action
7	<p><u>Youth MPs Update</u></p> <p>The Youth MPs verbally reported on recent events and activities including :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer activities, including residential trips. • Planning for the second Young Inspectors Pilot Inspection. • Involvement in the UK Youth Parliament Steering Group. • Feedback, as requested at the last meeting, on their thoughts on the impact of the cost of living crisis, and this dialogue would continue. • The forthcoming Annual Takeover Challenge would have Child Poverty as its theme, and it was hoped over 100 young people would be in attendance on 2nd November at King George's Hall (Windsor Suite). 	Noted
8.1	<p><u>CCTV Hub-Staffing</u></p> <p>The Executive Board received a report which advised that the current provision for staffing of the CCTV hub was now ending and therefore an open tender exercise had been undertaken.</p> <p>RESOLVED -</p> <p>That the Executive Board:</p> <p>Approves the award of the contract for the Councils CCTV hub staffing for a two year period with the option to extend for a further four number one year periods to Enigma CCTV Ltd.</p>	Approved
8.2	<p><u>Review of Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and Prudential/Treasury Indicators</u></p> <p>A report was submitted that sought approval for a revised policy for the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision and amended Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators for 2022/23.</p> <p>RESOLVED –</p> <p>2.1 The Executive Board is requested to recommended to Council Forum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The policy on the Minimum Revenue Provision as set out at <i>Appendix A.</i> b) The amended Prudential Indicators for 2022/23 as set out at <i>Appendix B.</i> 	Approved

	Item	Action
	2.2 The Executive Board is also requested to approve the amended Treasury Management Indicators for 2022/23 as set out at Appendix C .	Approved
8.3	<p><u>Discretionary Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme (Housing Support Fund)</u></p> <p>Members were reminded that the Government had over the past year announced various measures to support communities who were struggling financially due to the cost of living crisis. Included in the measures had been the provision of funding for a Discretionary Council Tax Energy Rebate scheme, and the announcement of a third round of Household Support Scheme Funding.</p> <p>The report sought authority to combine the Discretionary Scheme with some of the Household Support Scheme funding to provide for a £150 credit payment to all Council Tax Support households with dependent children. This credit would free up income for struggling families in the Borough to provide assistance with the financial pressures from increasing energy and general living costs.</p> <p>RESOLVED –</p> <p>That the Executive Board:</p> <p>2.1 Agree to use the Discretionary Council Tax Energy Rebate funding and a proportion of the Household Support Funding round 3 as set out in the report.</p>	Approved
8.4	<p><u>Revenue Monitoring 2022/23 – Quarter 1</u></p> <p>Members received an update on the Council's Revenue Budget for 2022/23 on the basis of a budget monitoring exercise undertaken at the end of June 2022.</p> <p>RESOLVED -</p> <p>That the Executive Board;-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) give approval to the Portfolio Cash Limit Adjustments as outlined in Appendix 1; b) note the General Fund Budget Summary position as at 30th June 2022; c) in view of the forecast overspend of £8.14m, the Executive Board request Portfolio Holders to review their budgets for the remainder of 2022/23 with a view to addressing the issues identified and limiting the amount of monies that would be required to be taken from reserves at financial year end. d) Note the Earmarked Reserves and General Fund Balance position as at 30th June 2022. 	<p>Approved</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Approved</p> <p>Noted</p>

	Item	Action
8.5	<p><u>Capital Monitoring 2022/23 – Quarter 1</u></p> <p>A report was submitted on the overall financial position of the Council in respect of the Capital Programme as at 30th June 2022, highlighting key issues and explaining variations in the first 3 months of the financial year.</p> <p>RESOLVED – That the Executive Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • approve the revised capital programme as per Appendix 1, • approve the variations to the programme shown in Appendix 2. 	<p>Approved</p> <p>Approved</p>
10.1	<p><u>Update to Fees and Charges</u></p> <p>A new Fees and charges framework had been developed which provided an opportunity to consider how a different approach to fees and charges could contribute to reducing the Council's budget deficit.</p> <p>The Fees and charges framework would consider all fees and charges made to residents and businesses for the use of services provided by the Council where the Council had the discretion to charge.</p> <p>The overarching aim of the fees and charges framework was to deliver a positive contribution to the Council's efficiencies and additional income targets, helping to safeguard frontline services that the Council provided.</p> <p>The report made recommendations for increases in fees and charges for burial and cremation services, parking services and green waste services. In addition, the report also recommended that the Council reduce its allocation of parking spaces on the Mall car park and transfer the majority of the parking spaces required to Feilden Street Multi Storey car park.</p> <p>RESOLVED –</p> <p>That the Executive Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notes the draft fees and charges framework and approves its use where the Council has the discretion to set the level of fees and charges. • Approves the proposed fees and charges increases for burials and cremations to be implemented from 1 November 2022. 	<p>Noted and Approved</p> <p>Approved</p>

	Item	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approves the proposed fees and charges increases for parking services to be implemented from 1 November 2022. 	Approved
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approves the proposed fees and charges increases for green waste collection services to be implemented from 1 January 2023. 	Approved
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approves the reduction in the Council's allocation of 225 parking spaces on the Mall car park to 50 parking spaces and the relocation of 175 parking spaces to Feilden Street Multi- Storey Car Park with effect from 1 January 2023. 	Approved
	AT THIS STAGE OF THE PROCEEDINGS THE PRESS AND PUBLIC WERE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEETING.	
11.1	<p><u>Update to Fees and Charges</u></p> <p>Further to the report submitted at Agenda Item 10.1, additional information was submitted for consideration by the Executive Board which was considered commercially sensitive and therefore exempt from publication. The resolution at 10.1 was unchanged.</p> <p>Signed at a meeting of the Board</p> <p>on 13th October 2022</p> <p>(being the ensuing meeting on the Board)</p> <p>Chair of the meeting at which the Minutes were confirmed</p>	Noted and approved

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: **EXECUTIVE BOARD**

DATE: **13TH OCTOBER 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)

EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Public Health, Prevention and Wellbeing
LEAD OFFICERS:	Strategic Director of Adults and Health
DATE:	Thursday, 13 October 2022

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Public Health Prevention and Wellbeing
WARD/S AFFECTED:	
ALL	
KEY DECISION:	Y

SUBJECT: Prevent Local Delivery 2022/2023

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prevent forms part of the UK's national counter-terrorism strategy, as one of the four P's (Prevent, Prepare, Protect & Pursue)

The overarching objectives for Prevent¹ are to:

- Tackle the causes of radicalisation and respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism;
- Safeguard and support those most at risk of radicalisation through early intervention, identifying them and offering support; and
- Enable those who have already engaged in terrorism to disengage and rehabilitate.

Lancashire is a priority area nationally and is funded by the Home Office to provide dedicated resources to deliver against these priorities. Blackburn with Darwen is the host and lead authority for the Lancashire team and Prevent programme sub regionally, and is the recipient of the grant funding.

This report notes the grant allocation issued to Blackburn with Darwen for 2022-23 and requests approval from the Executive Board to spend against it.

The Home Office Allocation for 2022-23 is £597,284.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

- Notes the funding package being made available to Lancashire, through Blackburn with Darwen to meet the costs of 2022/23 Prevent Local Delivery.

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/716907/140618_CCS207_CCS0218929798-1_CONTEST_3.0_WEB.pdf

- Approves expenditure against this budget in discharging the requirements of the grant conditions.

3. BACKGROUND

The Home Office run an annual cross-Government Prevent prioritisation process to inform the allocation of resource to meet the threat in local authorities. Data from key stakeholders is used to rank local authorities by their Prevent-related threat.

In 2019, the Home Office assessed that BwD was no longer a priority area in their own right. However the risk and threat to Lancashire as a whole, placed it in the top four nationally and they approached Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council (BwDBC) to establish a 'Centre of Excellence' to oversee Prevent delivery for Lancashire.

The Home Office have provided an annual grant for staff and project delivery which would enable the Prevent Coordinator to implement a delivery plan which incorporates resources to risk across the Lancashire footprint.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

Prevent local delivery is already in operation, and it is imperative that support is delivered to vulnerable people at risk of radicalisation in a timely manner. The council as the lead authority needs to ensure the consistency of this support to effectively reduce identified vulnerabilities to radicalisation and keep people safe.

It is also important that Prevent funded projects should meet the local threat covering specific areas, institutions and groups identified as being at risk to radicalisation. Activity should focus on high priority local threats / hot spots. The specific outcomes of the Projects are:

- mitigate local Prevent threats
- increased resilience of those most vulnerable to radicalisation
- provide counter-narrative projects that seek to build resilience, within individuals and/or communities, by addressing risk factors
- provide the skills and confidence, within individuals and/or communities, to resist the threat posed by extremist influences
- Increased knowledge and awareness of the causes and signs of radicalisation

Impact of delivery:

Increased community resistance to terrorist narratives; greater awareness of the signs of radicalisation and supporting vulnerable people at risk of radicalisation.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There is no change or impact on current BwD policy. This is a continuation of a long established team and programme

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Funding

- Following a bid for Lancashire Prevent Local Delivery 2022/2023 the Home Office agreed to provide an annual grant agreement for the following amount: £597,284
- Waivers have been completed and approved for 2022-23 project delivery and interventions.

- There is no match funding requirement from the Borough Council.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

No legal implications.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Resources required of the programme are funded through the programme.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 ☒ Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 ☐ In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA link here*)

Option 3 ☐ In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA attachment*)

10. CONSULTATIONS

Consultation with Home Office Homeland Security, Counter Terrorism Police North West, organisations/ companies responsible for project delivery, LA Prevent Leads, Lancashire Prevent Education Officer

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded and published if applicable.

VERSION:	1
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CONTACT OFFICER:	Mayjabeen Hussain
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DATE:	06/09/2022
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BACKGROUND PAPER:	
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EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
LEAD OFFICERS:	Strategic Director of Children's & Education (DCS)
DATE:	Thursday, 13 October 2022

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Children, Young People and Education
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
KEY DECISION:	N

SUBJECT: Adoption Annual Report 2021 - 2022

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Head of Service for the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) has written this report which provides a review of adoption activity for 2021/22.

It includes Blackburn with Darwen (BwD) children specific information.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board is asked to note the report.

3. BACKGROUND

Adoption Now is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) that provides Adoption Services on behalf of a consortium of six Local Authorities. These include Blackburn with Darwen, Bolton, Bury, Rochdale, Oldham and Tameside.

Blackburn with Darwen staff are seconded to the RAA.

Tracking of cases takes place bi-monthly. Seconded RAA staff and their Manager attend this meeting (now held by Teams) to consider the children's adoption journey.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

- During the year 24 children were subject to a decision that they Should Be Placed For Adoption (SHOBPA). Of the 24 children 9 were in the 0-2 age range 8 in the 3-4 age range, with 7 being over the age of 5.

- On 31/03/2022 there were 11 children with a plan for adoption, subject to placement order. This means that Court agree with the Local Authority care plan of adoption. 9 were linked to prospective Adopters and awaiting match. 1 child awaiting being placed with their brothers and sisters and 1 child's Foster Carers being assessed as Adopters.
- Children are matched by sharing their profile at Exchange Days. This is an event where Adopters can meet and hear directly from Social Workers and Foster Carers about children needing adoptive families. In the past year the RAA are using Link Maker which is a safe and secure online platform that supports Family Finding for children. Activity Day has taken place in February 2022 with another one planned for later in the year.
- In terms of approved Adopters there have been 76 which is a 13% reduction from last year at 87 but this is still less than the national trend seeing 16% reduction. Of note, there has been an increase in approving Adopters who can meet the needs of siblings, older children and those needing early permanence.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no policy implications

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The operational budgets supporting adoption are transferred to Adoption Now at the beginning of each financial year and combined with the budgets from the other five local authorities. The costs of placing children with Adopters outside of Adoption Now in 2021/22 was £131,087 against a budget of £330,000, an underspend of £198,913. The Adoption Service as a whole returned a reduced underspend of £78,332, predominantly due to the additional staffing pressures outlined in Appendix 1.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None identified

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

None identified

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 x Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 ☐ In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA link here)*

Option 3 ☐ In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA attachment)*

9. CONSULTATIONS

None required

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

VERSION:	1
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CONTACT OFFICER:	Amy Brooks, Judith Fennell, Helen Kane
DATE:	16/09/2022
BACKGROUND PAPER:	Adoption Annual Report 2021-2022 (Regional Adoption Agency)

Adoption Annual Report 2021/22



Executive Report

1. Introduction

Achieving adoption for children contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people in line with priorities outlined in other Council plans.

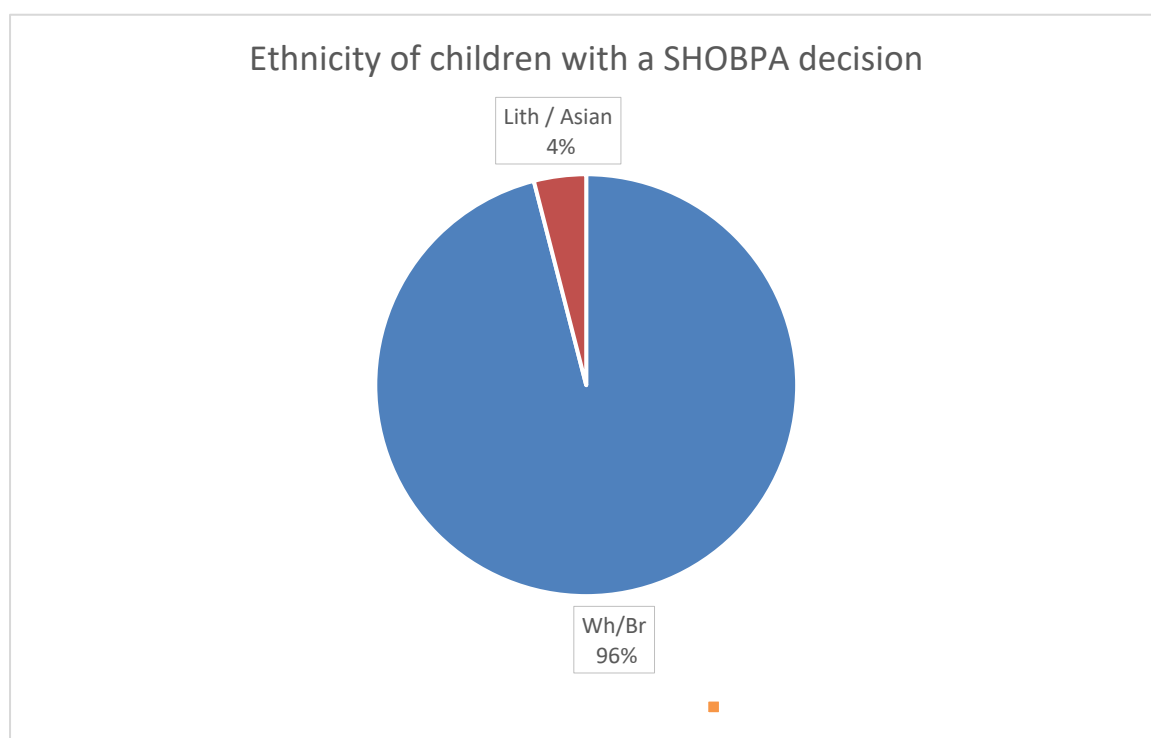
Almost 5 years ago there was a significant change in the way that adoption services were delivered as Adoption Now went live on 20th November 2017. Adoption Now is a Regional Adoption Agency providing adoption services on behalf of six Local Authorities – Bolton, Blackburn with Darwen, Bury, Rochdale, Oldham and Tameside.

Data in this report relating to children remains local data relating to Blackburn children however, adoption support and recruitment data now covers the Region

2. Adoption Agency Business - Children

2a. Children with an Adoption Plan

During the year 24 children were subject to a decision that they should be placed for adoption (SHOBPA), The children who did receive a SHOBPA decision were primarily of white British origin (see chart below) although with a significant proportion from other (primarily Asian or dual heritage backgrounds).

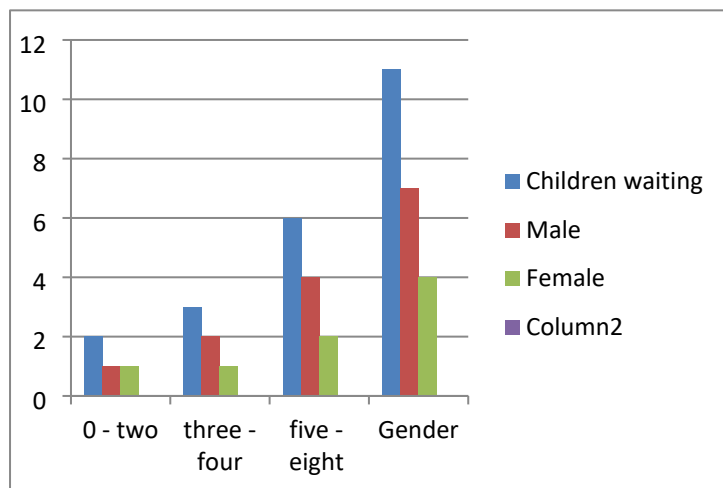


Of the 24 children, 9 children were in the 0 – 2 age range, 8 in the 3 to 4 age range and 7 aged over 5.

2b. Children Awaiting a Match

On 31st March, there were 11 children with a plan for adoption (subject to a placement order) awaiting placement and not yet matched. Of these children 9 were linked to adopters and awaiting a match, 1 child was waiting to be placed with a sibling and one child's foster carer was being assessed as adopters for them.

Age and Gender of children waiting



Continued efforts to match all children waiting will include them being profiled at Exchange days where adopters can come and discuss children available for adoption and all will be invited to attend a Family Adoption Day run by Adoption Now if this is appropriate for them. A new virtual event called Link and play has also been used whilst Covid rates were high. This is an innovative alternative to an activity day devised by Adoption Now staff. A Northwest regional activity day also took place in February 2022 and a further day is planned for later in 2022.

2c. Family Finding Activity

Professional links and relationships have continued to result in some positive matches. In the past year Adoption Now have started to put all children onto Link Maker alongside all approved adopters to enable adopters to see for themselves the children waiting. This seems to be positive resulting in some adopters expressing interest in children then hadn't previously thought they would consider. The regional placement group meeting continues to operate on a monthly basis to encourage matches with local voluntary adoption agencies.

The development of Adoption Now means that families that would have been approved by the six local authorities are all part of the same organisation and are immediately available to Blackburn's children. In this year 75% of Blackburn's children placed were placed with RAA adopters (12 out of 16). These placements do not incur an interagency fee.

It is practice to search for a family within Adoption Now in the first instance and then to look further afield to other local authorities, RAA's or Voluntary Adoption Agencies

2d. Children Placed for Adoption

There have been 16 children matched with adopters this year.

There were 14 adoption orders granted in the year.

The scorecard data for children adopted between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022 is as follows:-

Measure		Blackburn average
Placement Order to Matching (A2)	Scorecard Indicator - 121 days	21/22 363
Child entering care starting adoption placement (A10)	Scorecard indicator – 426 days	608

These figures show that during the year timescales are above the target for A10 and for A2.

Within this cohort of children are 3 sibling groups of 2 who were all older children and some with additional needs, 2 children with significant learning needs and 1 child who had experienced a disruption and was then adopted by his subsequent foster carer. One child was also delayed in being placed due to the first covid lockdown.

Scorecard measures are not 'counted' until the year after an Adoption Order has been made, therefore these figures will not influence the published Scorecard results for some time yet.

A10 is an indicator that can be affected by court timescales and can vary hugely due to a variety of other factors. The A2 measure represents the family finding process for children.

2e. Children Adopted

14 adoption orders were made during this period. It is these children for whom the score card data refers.

2f. Adoption Disruption

There has been one disruption of an adoption placement during the first half of the year. A disruption is identified as a placement where the child has moved in with adopters and then the placement has failed. The child concerned was older and a disruption meeting has been held to try to understand the reasons for this and learn any lessons.

2g. Early Permanence Placements

At the end of the year there were 4 children placed with Early Permanence carers awaiting the outcome of care proceedings.

These placements are in the fostering phase but are placed with carers who will adopt them should the court plan ultimately be adoption for the child so they will not incur another move unless it is back to the birth family.

3. Adoption Agency Business - Adopters

Recruitment

3a. Staffing

The Recruitment and Marketing workstream is responsible for the recruitment, assessment, training, and support of prospective adopters. The team comprises 26 individuals:

- 2 Team Managers
- 1.5 Advanced Practitioners
- 14.5 FTE social workers (10 part time, 9 full time)
- 3 Marketing Workers

Last year the workstream experienced unprecedented levels of staff sickness and absence. This trend continued in the first six months of 2021 with 7 staff having absence of a month or more and two social work posts vacated. We have recruited to 5 vacated social work posts in total this year (26% of assessing social workers).

At no point in the last 12 months has the team been fully staffed and this continues to be our most significant operational challenge.

3b. Headline Data.

76 Adopters approved, a 13% reduction on last year but less than the national trend at 16%.

24 (32%) of those 76 adopters were offering Fostering for Adoption (FFA) at the point of approval (a rise on last year).

55 (72%) of those 76 families were offering singleton placements. This includes 7 second time adopters motivated to adopt a sibling and 4 foster carer approvals.

21 (28%) of those 76 were offering sibling placements (a significant rise on last year at 16%).

45 (59%) were offering placements to children over 2 years. 30 families within the 2-4 years age range and 15 within the 4-7 years range.

15 (20%) were returning adopters; the majority second time applicants, one returning for a fourth time.

13 (17%) of those 67 were LGBT couples

10 (13%) of those 76 were single applicants

96% of PAR reports deemed Excellent or Good by the adoption panel, a rise on last year

14 Fostering for Adoption (FFA) placements made with RAA approved families, an increase of 40% on last year (10 placements) and a 100% increase on 2019/20 (7 placements).

68 RAA children matched with 62 RAA families (6 sibling groups of 2).

70 % of the 95 placements made across the RAA were with RAA approved families.

Conversions to applications from enquiries rose to 46% this year compared to 35% in 20/21. The Agency had 117 applications this year compared to 122 last year with 90 less enquiries. The evidence suggests that the surge in enquiries during the pandemic did not increase applications.

Analysis

3c. Approvals

In the full year **preceding the formation of the RAA**, (1st April 2016 - 31st March 2017), the local authority adoption teams in our six agencies approved **67** adopters collectively.

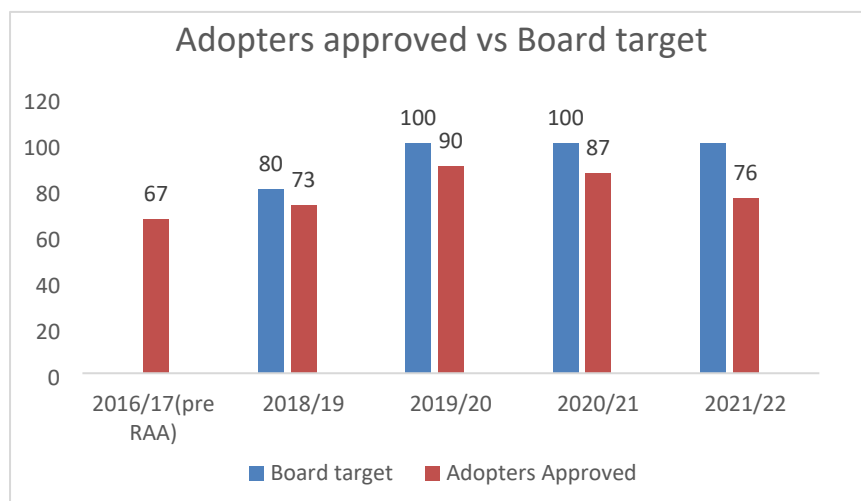
In the **first** full year of RAA operation (1st April 2018- 31st March 2019), **73** adopters were approved and 91 RAA children were matched with 84 RAA families.

In our **second** year (1st April 2019-31st March 2020), **91** families were presented to panel 90 were approved (1 deferred and then withdrew) ; 78 RAA children were matched with 71 RAA families. (6 in groups of 2). Additionally, 3 RAA families had 4 children placed with them from external agencies.

In our **third** year (1st April 2020 – 31st March 2021), **87** families were presented to panel and approved (two others were panel ready, 1 family withdrew, 1 had an unexpected admission to hospital). 79 RAA children were matched with 70 RAA families (9 in groups of two).

In this our **fourth** year (1st April 2021 -31st March 2022), 77 families were presented to panel, and **76** were approved, one not approved. A further nine families were panel ready, but circumstances prevented them from progressing within the year.

There have also been 3 children placed with 3 RAA families from external agencies, generating an income of £81,000. A further sibling assessment has been completed by Adoption Now, where court proceedings have not yet concluded. An initial payment of £9,000 has been requested in the interim to cover work completed, totalling £90,000 in anticipated recharges for the year.



This year (2021/22) the team was again given a target of 100 adopter approvals and achieved 76. In the three years of operation, the workstream has yet to meet the adopter approval targets set by the board but there has been a continued improvement in the number of adoptive families approved that was achieved by the 6 agencies working separately (67 as last reported in 2016/17.) Importantly there has been a significant increase in recruiting adopters who can meet the needs of siblings, older children, and those needing early permanence.

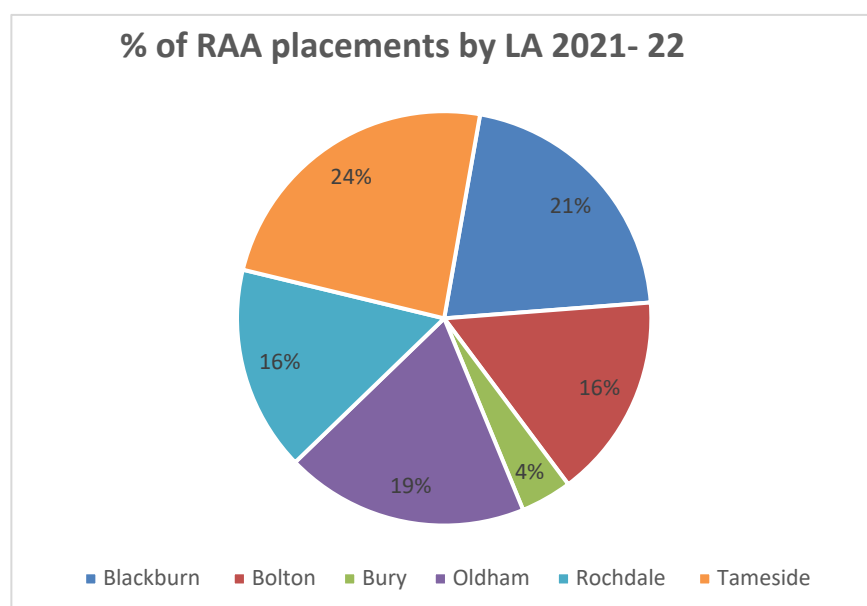
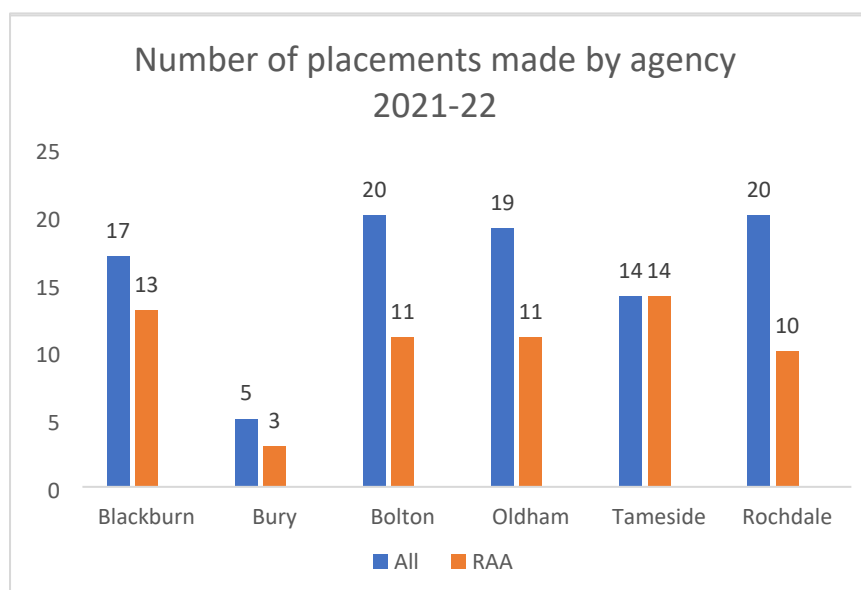
Enquiries from prospective adopters continued throughout the pandemic, some months in significantly higher numbers to the norm. However, this trend changed in 2021/22 with a significant decrease in enquiries from the previous year, **341** compared to **251**. Despite this, conversion of enquiries to applications rose from 35% to 46%. This is likely to be a result of the National Recruitment strategy which has opened the criteria for accepting applications. Whilst positive, this has also resulted in more complex assessments resulting in delays in either stage 1 or 2, or both.

Projections for the forthcoming year are not too dissimilar to the same period in the previous year; **12** approvals are anticipated in Q1, **41** approvals anticipated in Q2, and currently **10** approvals predicted in Q3 (totalling 63). The team target for 2022/23 is again 100 adopter approvals. To reach this target a further 37 applications must be accepted and in the system by 31st September 2022 (unless returning adopters who can be fast tracked through the process in four months). However, this figure does not account for delays or complexities within assessment, therefore realistically a further 50 to 60 applications need to be in the system to allow for this give. The challenge for the Agency is therefore increasing the number of enquiries and resultant applications during the next four months (ideally a minimum of 13 applications per month), alongside ensuring that as many of those as possible can meet the ongoing needs of our children who are waiting.

3d. Matches

This year 115 children were matched from the 6 LA's with 95 families. (78 singleton placements, 15 placements of 2 children, 1 placement of 3 and one of 4.)

65% of the 95 placements were made with RAA approved families.



3e. Adopter Recruitment Data 1.4.21- 31.3.22

	Numbers	Notes
Applications presented to Panel and approved 1.4.21 – 31.3.22	76	77 families presented to panel and achieved ADM. 76 approved, one not approved. 9 further assessments were panel ready. 1 family withdrew due to a negative recommendation, 2 needed more time to ensure finances were ready, five had complexities that ensued at the end of assessment, 1 family factored in an unexpected house move.
Adopters Approved and waiting for a match at 31.3.21	26	The high number of approved adopters available this year is due to a reduction in the numbers of children waiting with a Placement Order due to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on court time scales.

Adopters Linked or Matched on 31.3.21	11	
Adopters with Children in Placement on 31.3.21	46	
Initial enquiries 1.4.21 -31.3.22	251	196 couples, 55 single adopters. A number of those are now in the system for approvals 2022-23. This figure is a significant decrease from numbers of enquiries received for the same period last year when still in pandemic conditions (341). However, interestingly conversion rates to applications this year have significantly increased.
Applications accepted 1.4.21 – 31.3.22	117	This equates to a 46% conversion rate as of 31.3.21 . This compares to a 35% conversion rate last year where 341 enquiries resulted in 122 applications. A number of the 251 enquiries are still in the system and may register an application after 31.3.21. It is noted that there are still families from this cohort whom we would welcome registering their interest with us who have not yet returned their application.
Total Adopters currently on track 22/23.	63	Q1 12 Q2 41 Q3 10

3f. Matching factors

The challenge to recruit sufficient adopters willing to consider siblings placed together, children 5 years plus, those with additional needs or those placed under early permanence remains a priority locally and nationally. Whilst not a legal requirement the ability to match children on the basis of their ethnicity remains an important consideration as is the need therefore to recruit from a broad demographic that reflects the backgrounds of our children.

Siblings: In 2021/22 year 21 families were approved to adopt siblings. 20 of those were offering placements to 2 children and one was offering a placement to three children. This is 27% of all approved families, a significant rise from 16% in 2021/22, and only 7% in 2020/21.

This is a strong indicator that the recruitment drive to encourage more families to consider more than one child is effective. Since May 2020, the recruitment team have been holding a specific session monthly, aimed at encouraging families to consider siblings and current indications are that this is having a positive impact.

Single/LGBT: Single and LGBT applicants have been part of targeted national and local 'myth busting' marketing campaigns for a number of years with success in increasing awareness and adoptions. For some time, LGBT applicants were known to be statistically more likely to have older or more complex children or sibling group placements (in part because they often came with fewer preconceptions of baby placements). Increasingly however subjective preferences for two parent heterosexual couples have been eroded and now these groups are increasingly likely to express similar preferences for singleton younger children.

Of the 76 families approved in the agency, there were 10 single applicants and 13 LGBT couples.

Early permanence: Prospective adopters are advised about early permanence options with a focus on recruitment for Fostering for Adoption (FfA) from first enquiry onwards.

Since May 2020 virtual group sessions have been delivered by the team bi monthly for those adopters in assessment wishing to consider early permanence by FfA. Since August 2020 this training has been made mandatory for all those considering children 0-2 years. It has now become a full day of Early Permanence training in addition to the three day standard preparation that is delivered (1 day virtually and 2 face to face) for all first time adopters.

This year, 24 (32%) of approved families offered FfA placements.

16 children were placed on an FfA basis with RAA approved adopters this year; an increase of 60% on last year (10 placements) and a 129% increase on 2020/21 (7 placements). One of the 16 FfA placements disrupted and in another case the child placed was returned to the care of a birth relative.

On the 31.03.22 there were eight families available offering FfA who were unmatched.

Ethnicity of adopters: Routine tracking of children with adoption plans across the RAA gives the agency an informed perspective on the demographic of adopters we would ideally like to recruit to meet the needs of our children. In this year we have continued to see diversity in new enquiries; with 38% of our applicants being other than White British. We see a steady flow of Asian/Pakistani families, but we continue to target Black African families where we know there is a local and national need.

3g. Timeliness

This year 32% of Stage 1 assessments were completed within the two-month timescale compared to 47% in 2020/21. The reduction in Stage 1 outcomes have been impacted by the removal on the 30th September 2021, of the *Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020*. These amendments gave management discretion regarding progression to stage 2, where there were delays in achieving adopter medicals, during the pandemic.

Timeliness of Stage 1 have also been impacted locally and nationally by the Government's National Adoption Strategy, which is leading to more complexities in stage 1 assessments and resultant delays in checks and references being returned.

64% of Stage 2's assessments (47 out of 76) were completed within the 4month timescale compared to 80% in 2020/21. Increased Stage 2 delays have resulted from complexities arising in assessment, life events, and staff sickness and absence.

3h. Quality of reports to Panel

Of the 76 approvals, 96% of reports were judged good or excellent by panel members.

3i. Complaints

There were two formal complaints to the agency in the period. The complaints were addressed internally at Head of Service level.

3j. Disruptions

Adoption placements with RAA families continue to evidence stability, despite the additional challenges of the pandemic. Of the 68 RAA children matched and placed with 62 RAA families, there has been one disruption with RAA adopters in the period involving a Rochdale child.

There has also been one disruption pre panel of a Blackburn 5 year old placed FfA direct from birth mothers care (where the FfA carers gave notice, a few days into placement) and one Rochdale child placed FfA who was successfully returned to birth family care, with the support of the FfA carers.

3k. Team and service development

The last annual report concluded with a recommendation to address issues in relation to recording and data management issues in the workstream. This has become even more pressing with so many new staff joining the team who are unfamiliar with our systems and processes. Poor recording inevitably leads to inaccurate reporting from the system. To address this, we have worked with Liquid Logic colleagues to deliver three virtual training sessions mandatory for all staff. The training was recorded for sharing with new social workers to the team. The Liquid Logic workstream manual has also been updated by our Advanced Practitioner, who is also mentoring staff and providing workshops.

In respect of the pandemic restrictions, since March 2021 the relaxation of regulations and the opportunity for vaccines for keyworkers enabled the gradual resumption of face-to-face service delivery in the workstream, which was welcomed by the team. Any virtual working is now used, where sensible, for operational efficiency rather than necessity. Assessments sessions between prospective adopters and social workers are largely face to face, and 'in person' preparation groups have been redeveloped and are delivered monthly.

The new 'hybrid' Adopter Preparation Groups, developed by the team this year, consist of Day 1 materials, delivered virtually and Days 2 and 3 are delivered in person. This format means prospective adopters now start face-to-face groups with some underpinning knowledge of adoption. This enables more engaging experiential learning and group work over the two days rather than 'chalk and talk' delivery. This new style has been very well received by groups to date. In addition, those considering children 0-2 are required to attend the Early Permanence (Fostering for Adoption) training delivered in the team, one day bimonthly. Specialist training for prospective sibling adopters is also offered. Both have positively encouraged adopter interest and confidence in considering these routes, as evidenced in these years increased outcomes.

Dedicated second time adopter training (delivered in person) has been developed and starts later this year.

Other groups delivered by the team include Information events, delivered virtually, twice a month at lunchtimes, evenings and weekends, to try and capture people's availability.

Cornerstones Virtual Reality (VR units) are a valuable resource bought in by the Agency and they are well used in assessment and preparation of adopters. Feedback from the team and adopters highlights the significant impact that the units have in increasing insight / understanding of a child's lived experience. The majority of staff have had the opportunity to attend training to ensure the units are used appropriately to ensure best outcomes.

4. Marketing Activity

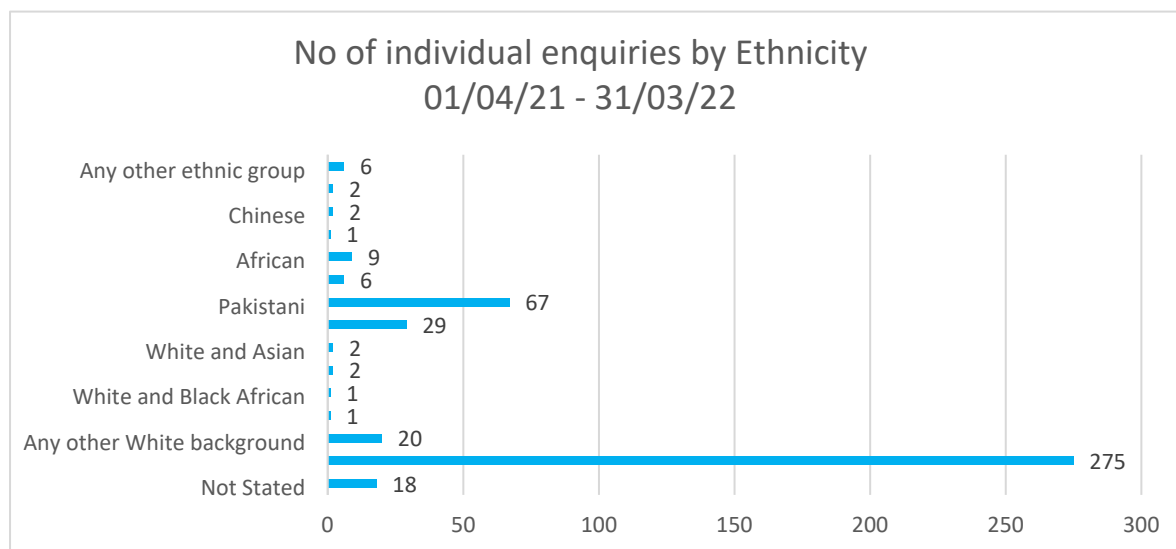
There are three members of the team who work exclusively on recruitment and marketing activity for Adoption Now.. The team also organise and attend Information Events, Link and Play Events, Adoption Days and manage internal tracking and reporting of Adopter and Children's cases to enable targeted marketing, and oversee the management of the Website and Social Media.

Adopter recruitment continues to be targeted with a wide reach across the 6 Local Authorities over the past 12 months with a view to building up a diverse profile of adopters to meet the needs of the children needing families. There is a targeted approach aimed to meet the needs of priority groups: those who can consider

siblings, children with complex needs, older children, BAME backgrounds and early permanence. There have also been more focused recruitment drives in respect of BAME and siblings as part of the National Recruitment Campaign but also driven by local need. There has also been a focus on recruiting more female LGBTQ+ adopters and single male adopters by podcasts, targeted information events and imagery. Marketing also continues to assess need based on the information provided at the monthly children's tracking meetings to ensure adopters are recruited to meet the specific needs of children within the Agency. Also analysed are enquiry rates including sources of enquiry, ethnicity of enquirer, enquiry by LA and conversions to help build future marketing drives.

CHART 1: Adopter Recruitment by Ethnicity

**Chart figures are individual count (i.e. If a couple each person is counted)*

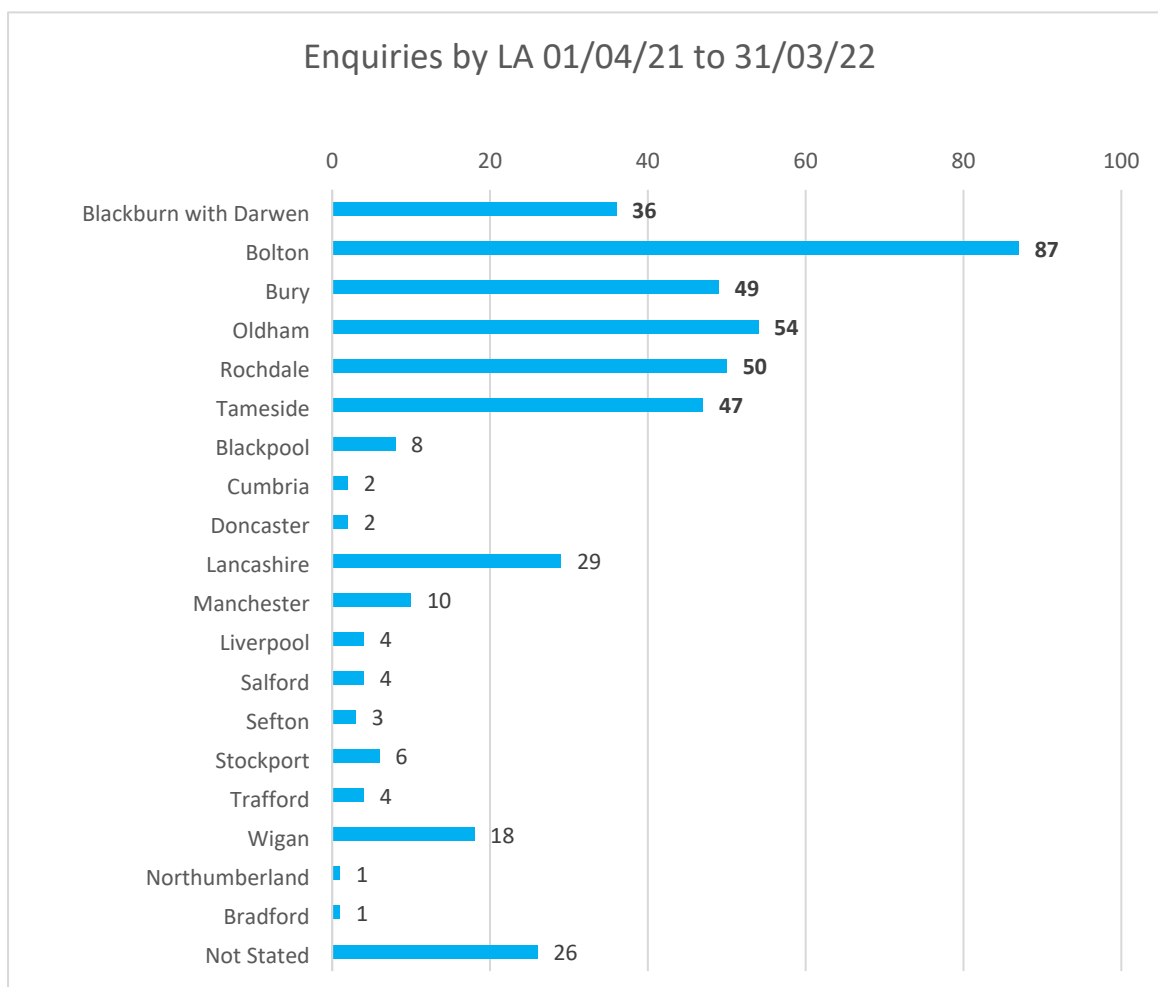


The highest proportion of enquiries continue to be from WB families at 62%. Due to the BAME campaign held Oct 21, as part of the National Recruitment Campaign (which gained us regional TV coverage) we saw an increase in Black African adopters. Almost 40% of applicants are now from backgrounds other than White British. This increasing diversity may be due to the development of targeted podcasts and interviews delivered by Adoption Now adopters of different ethnicities and social media advertisements and campaigns featuring various ethnicity images.

Our advertising has primarily focussed on images of BAME, children with additional needs, older children, and sibling groups. There has also been a positive shift in enquiries slightly outside the LA's due to a wider reach of the marketing activity.

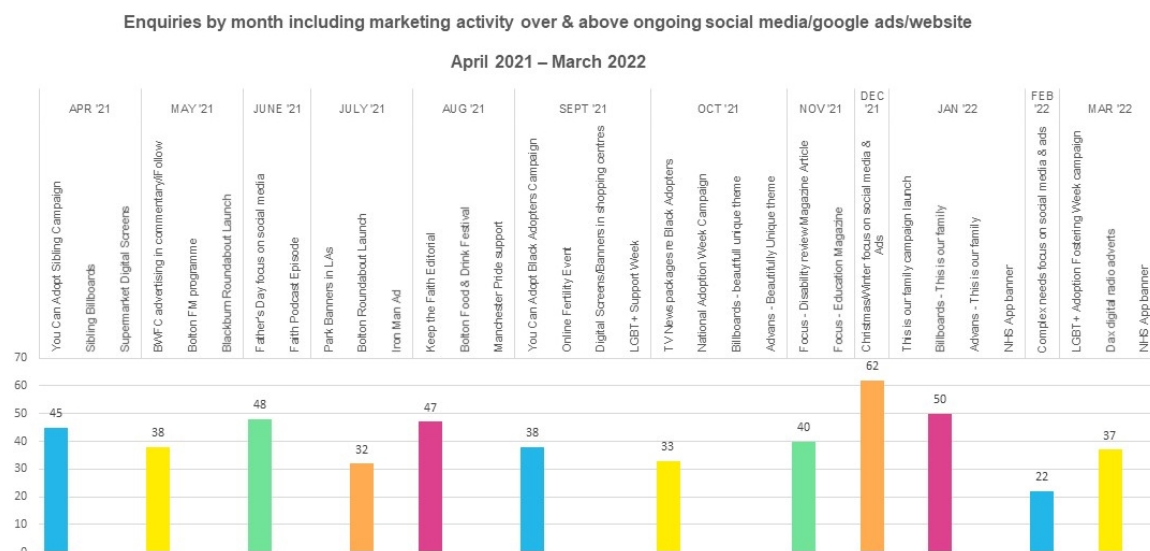
CHART 2: Adopter Recruitment by Local Authority

**Chart figures are individual count (i.e. If a couple each person is counted)*



Bolton has had the highest number of enquiries. This could be down to the head office and telephone number being within this LA. The marketing has been split equally over the 6 LA's however as Blackburn with Darwen enquiries remain lower than other LA's, additional marketing activity has included a roundabout sign, town centre billboards and Shuttle magazine. We are currently also looking into trailing boosted socials with them. There has been an increase in enquiries from areas outside of our 6 LA's, in particular from Lancashire and Wigan. Social media advertisements and use of wider reach marketing tools such as Advans, Supermarket billboards, Roadside billboards and DAX may have increased these out of area enquiries.

CHART 3: Number of enquiries received by month in line with additional marketing activity. (chart based on TOTAL number of marketing enquiries by source)



The above chart shows relevant enquiries taken on the duty line and email/web enquiries. Not all of these are transferred to Liquid Logic particularly if they are looking for information only at the time of contact.

December saw an uplift in enquiries likely to be due to the inclusion of online Information Event bookings as a relevant enquiry, which will be continued in reporting from then on as we are seeing more people using virtual information events as their starting point rather than contacting duty. There was also increased activity flow from National Adoption Week and the time of year being family focussed.

The pandemic continued to present a change in marketing strategy for the team as again many local and major events were cancelled. The team had planned to attend major events including Manchester Pride,

Fertility Event and Muslim Life Expo. All of which proved successful in 2019 based on enquiries generated. However, they were either cancelled or an alternate format held. The Fertility Event was online, and an online stall was manned but this was less successful. Recently a partnership with St Mary's fertility clinic has developed and this is positive.

In April 2021 the team commenced virtual Information Event presentations and stepped up the social media plan alongside additional Google and Facebook advertisements. The Virtual Information Events have proved highly successful averaging 13 attendees per session twice monthly (various weekdays and some weekends). The events were recently rated excellent by a mystery shopper and marketing are contacting attendees following the events, to encourage conversion to Initial Enquiry.

In October 2021, the National Adopter Recruitment Campaign was launched with an emphasis on recruiting adopters from BAME backgrounds. Alongside this, we ran a local campaign, with coverage on radio, press, internal and external newsletters, outdoor billboards and buses. We maximised use of social media and enhanced the website with podcasts, videos, and other supporting materials, focussing on BAME adopter stories. We were also successful in acquiring TV slots on Granada and BBC North West whereby one of our BAME adopters was interviewed gaining a positive social media reaction.

To drive targeted recruitment, we also had articles in the Disability Magazine and Keep the Faith. We also have had the NHS app running targeting NHS workers as they access their payslips / holiday info etc., this ceases in Oct 'Bill22.

This year has seen us working even more closely with all the LA comms teams who have supported us with input in newsletters, web banners on the council websites, banners in all the LA parks, press articles, social media and submitting our articles in resident magazines. We meet up regularly with the LA comms teams and have a face-to-face meeting planned in June to update on our recruitment strategy and share ideas for promoting adopters in their area to come forward.

We also trialled different marketing method to increase our target reach including DAX (streamed radio with a targeted call to action) and Advans. Both these methods of marketing had positive feedback from adopters. Hard however to ascertain if enquiries were generated from these sources however due to subliminal reach.

In April 21 Adopter Stories by Adoption Now podcast series was introduced onto the podcast hosting platform Anchor.fm. This switch enables us to release each episode of our podcasts simultaneously on the major podcasting platforms like Spotify, Apple Podcasts and Google Podcasts. To date we have released 25 episodes, with each one also embedded onto our website, racking up a total of over 4,000 plays.

Social Media

The agency has a presence on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. These are updated regularly and followers are growing increasing the reach. The Local Authority Communications teams often post items or follow messaging which increases the reach significantly.

Website Sessions By Device

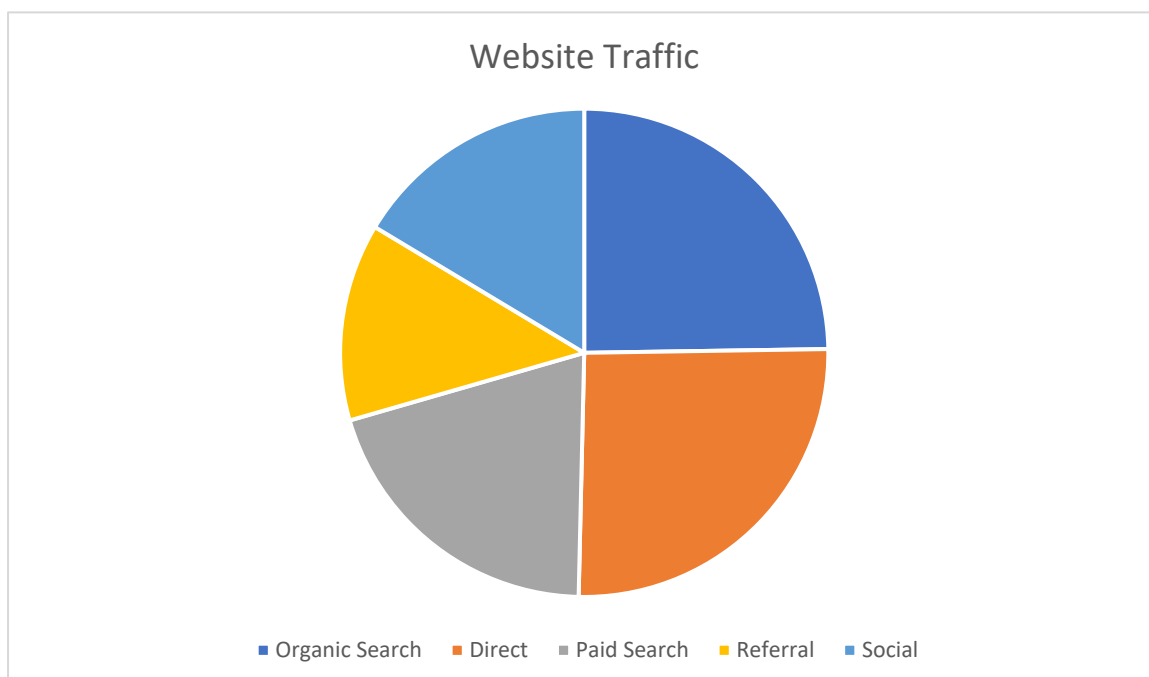
For this period, viewing of the website on a mobile device (phone) remains the most popular way amongst visitors with 72.7% of visitors choosing to view this way. Meaning that we continue to ensure that our website and any content that we upload to the site is optimised for the mobile viewing experience.

Website

In the period 1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022, there were 701 website forms completed and 456 downloads of our Information Pack. It is worth noting that the downloadable Information Pack has only been available online since the 2nd of February 2021 however, it continues to climb in terms of downloads.

Website Traffic

For the period 1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022, direct and organic searches brought in the most traffic and new users to the website, which shows that continued focus on Search Engine Optimisation is really working in our favour. A quarter of users came direct to the site without using a search engine to find us.



Aside from our Contact Form the FAQ's, Adopter & Child stories and our Podcast pages all continue to be the most viewed on the website.

There has been good support from the Local Authority Communications Teams across the 6 Local Authorities and these links are important to increase the marketing reach of the service.

There is a separate recruitment and sufficiency strategy that details the future plans for ensuring that adopters are recruited to meet the needs of the children needing to be placed.

5. Adoption Support

5a. Team Structure:

1 FT Team Manager, 1 FT Senior Practitioner, 0.5 Advanced Practitioner, 10 FTE Social Workers and 2 family support workers (1.5 equivalent).

5b. Staffing, Team building and transitions:

Whilst the impact of covid is very much still present, the last 12 months have seen a welcome period of stability in comparison to 2020-2021. The Adoption Support Team has experienced several staffing changes in this time, including the 2 part-time senior practitioners leaving the service, the part-time advanced practitioner becoming full-time and one of the social workers currently acting up in part-time vacancy. The service has seen new recruits to the 1.5 family support worker roles as well as a recruit to a part-time social work post.

The support team is currently managing with 1.5 social work vacancies, whilst there is some agency cover in place this does not fill the gap completely. In addition, there are 2 part-time social workers who have returned from long-term sick periods not yet back to capacity.

The most significant change has been the addition of 2.5 letterbox and contact coordinators joining the support service with the transition of the letterbox service to Adoption Now. However, this has been managed with 1.5 since April 2022 due to maternity leave with the post not yet covered.

Despite the changes and challenges, the support team have pulled together to support one another and continued to offer a consistent service to meet the needs of all the Adoption Now families.

5c. Developing the service:

Adoption Support continue to deliver, in the main, a calendar of 'virtual' support for both workshops and support groups. There are aspects that are gradually returning face-to-face, such as the Nurture Group and the return of the Adoption Now Events. The first being a Winter Walk in December with a few of the team mapping out a trail around the lake at Heaton Park, dressed as Elves and a gift from Santa to finish! This was followed by an Easter Egg hunt in April and was very well attended, with over 50 children.

As reported in the last annual review, the starting point was to review each aspect of the core offer (workshop, group, training session) to explore what areas might work better as a hybrid model and what areas need to return to face-to-face. In February, the service saw the return of face-to-face prep training resulting in the focus of the review being on 'Starting your Adoptive Family' and 'Support to Family and Friends' – this is to explore content as well as the most effective way to deliver the workshops. However, planning is progressing to return 'Introduction to Theraplay and PACE/Growing Attachments' face-to-face soon, to ensure the workshop effectively demonstrates theraplay activities and enables adopters to participate and practice these.

As detailed in the mid-year review, Adoption Now has recommenced the in-house Therapeutic Parenting Course. This has run twice to date with a third course commencing in July 2022. The course has been reviewed and re-written to create a more interactive intervention, providing an opportunity for parents to have space for reflection, promoting positive and secure attachment relationships, to increase development of knowledge and therapeutic parenting skills, to enable parents to support their children to develop emotional literacy and regulation, and decrease difficulties around oppositional behaviour, attention and concentration, and build relationships with other adopters/adoptive families. This is being delivered face-to-face with families and feedback from families participating is very positive, specifically the 'call back/re-grouping'. This is yet to have a name/title, but the opportunity for participants to re-group, with one another and future group participants is being positively received and well attended. It is envisaged this will create an ongoing support group that will continue to grow, with this next group having first and second group participants. The social workers who have developed and facilitated the course are now working with other members of the support team to expand the learning and development across the adoption support service with a view to increasing the number of facilitators, frequency of the course, as well as developing an Adoption Now parenting teens course.

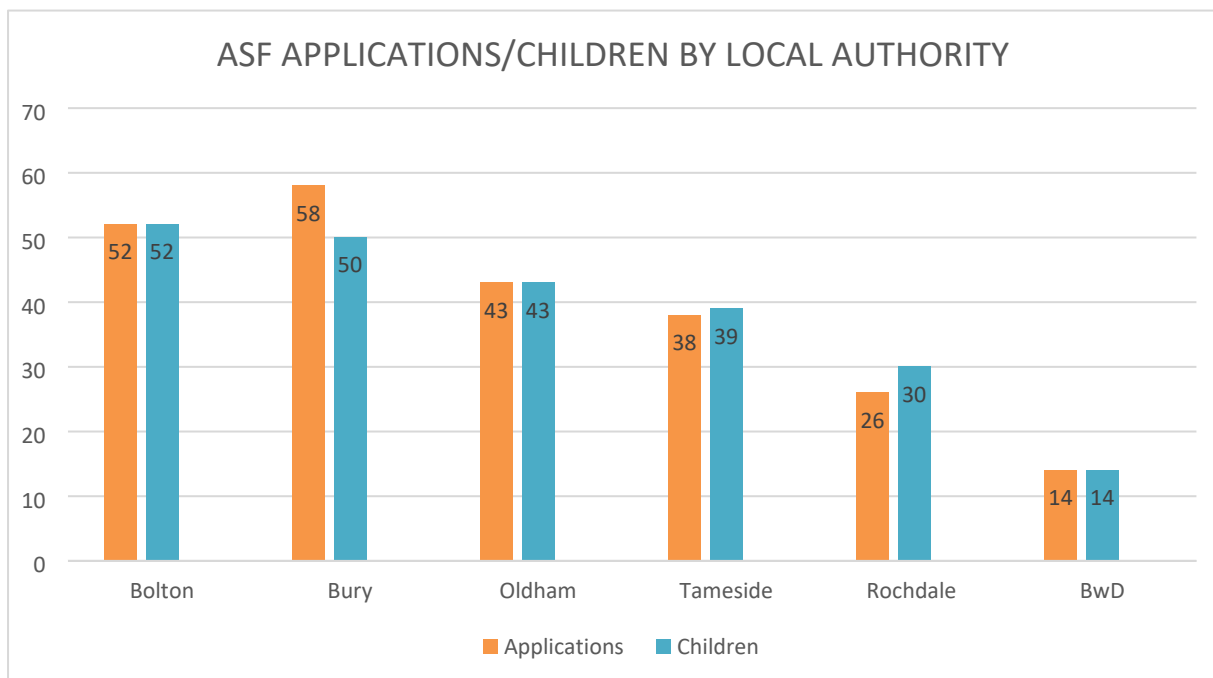
Adoption Now continue to undertake adoption support consultations for pre-matching, pre-placement support and early placement and these are becoming standard practise. They continue to be very positive and are invaluable in supporting the development of and the strengthening of adoption support plans. Whilst in infancy, there is a small group working on the adoption support plan with a view to an Adoption Now template for adoption support plans to create one consistent document that can be used from match support planning through to post order support planning. Positive and constructive feedback regarding the consultation process continues to be received from panel, from VAA's and from adopters, both within the RAA and outside. In addition, Adoption Now continues to share the progress and experiences with fellow RAA's. The reduction of disruptions pre adoption order is the evidence that this is successful.

5d. Adoption Support Fund:

Confirmation was announced earlier this year that the Adoption Support Fund will continue for the next 3 years. There are some changes being implemented in relation to payments – approved funds have previously been paid upfront; these will now be paid in arrears on receipt of invoices for completed work. This has brought the introduction of a further process on the ASF portal to release the funds as invoices are received. Whilst this has generated further work, it is anticipated this new process will reduce work around completing spend confirmations.

Total monies received 01/04/2020 – 31/03/2021	£728,245.88
Number of children currently receiving therapy funded via ASF	241
Number of applications made to the fund	233
Post order applications	204
Pre order applications	27

Local Authority Breakdown of LA ASF Applications/Children



Total monies paid for Match Funded Applications – 01/04/2021 – 31/03/2022	£ 9,676.00
Local Authority Breakdown:	
BwD	
Tameside	
Bolton	
Oldham	
Rochdale	£ 2,653.00
Bury	£ 7,023.00
Number of applications/children	5

In addition, there has been one match funded application, match funded by Western Bay Adoption Service (South Wales) for a child placed within the Adoption Now region.

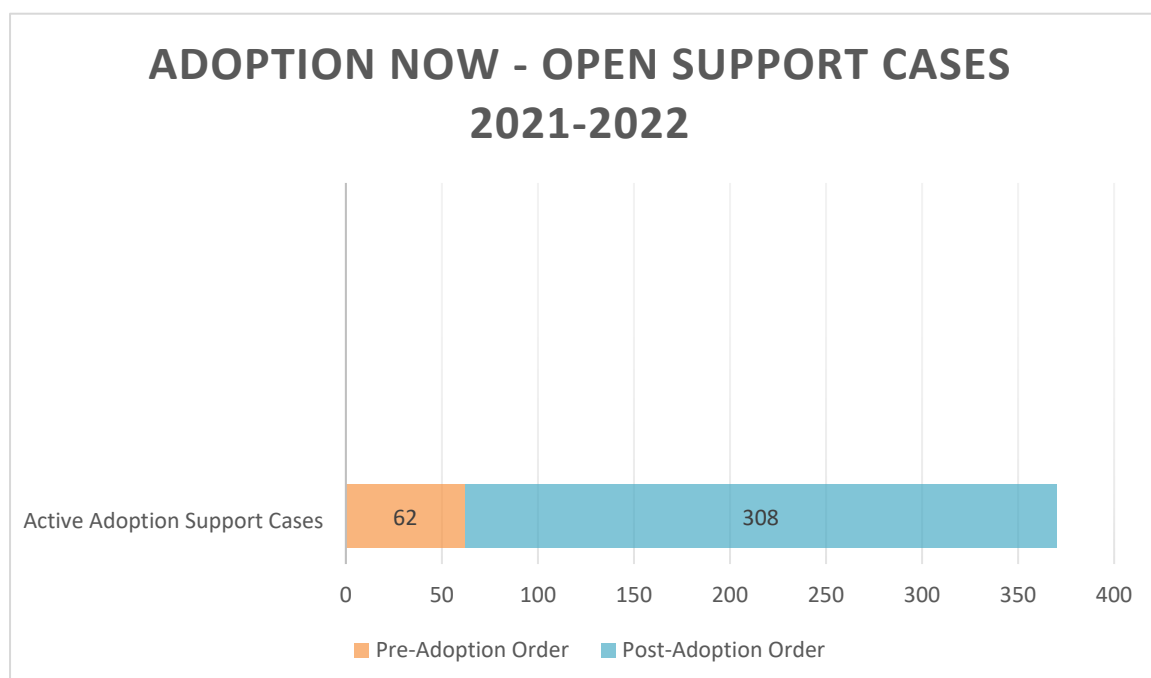
In this period, Adoption Now have made two applications to the Adoption Support Fund for packages of support provided by Adoption Now. Both applications have been for the in-house Therapeutic Parenting course, totalling £13,000.

The total monies claimed from the ASF in period has significantly increased from last year, 2020/2021, which was slightly less than in 2019/2020. However, the total ASF monies received in 2021/2022 is the highest since the formation of the RAA. The number of applications continues to increase with a bigger jump from 206 last year to 233 this year. The number of applications being made pre-adoption order are also increasing, from 18 last year to 27 this year.

As was the situation last year, a full review/audit of all ASF applications/cases has been undertaken to ensure Adoption Now comply with the ASF regulations and this continues to be a significant and timely task to complete. It is hoped that the introduction of the new payment system will reduce the time required for this annual task in 2022/2023. Whilst the total is not yet known, it is anticipated that Adoption Now will have returned more funds to the ASF this year than last year and in nearly all instances where this has been required a further ASF application has been made immediately to re-claim from the 2022/2023 budget to ensure there are no service/support breaks for the families.

5e. Adoption Support Cases/Workload:

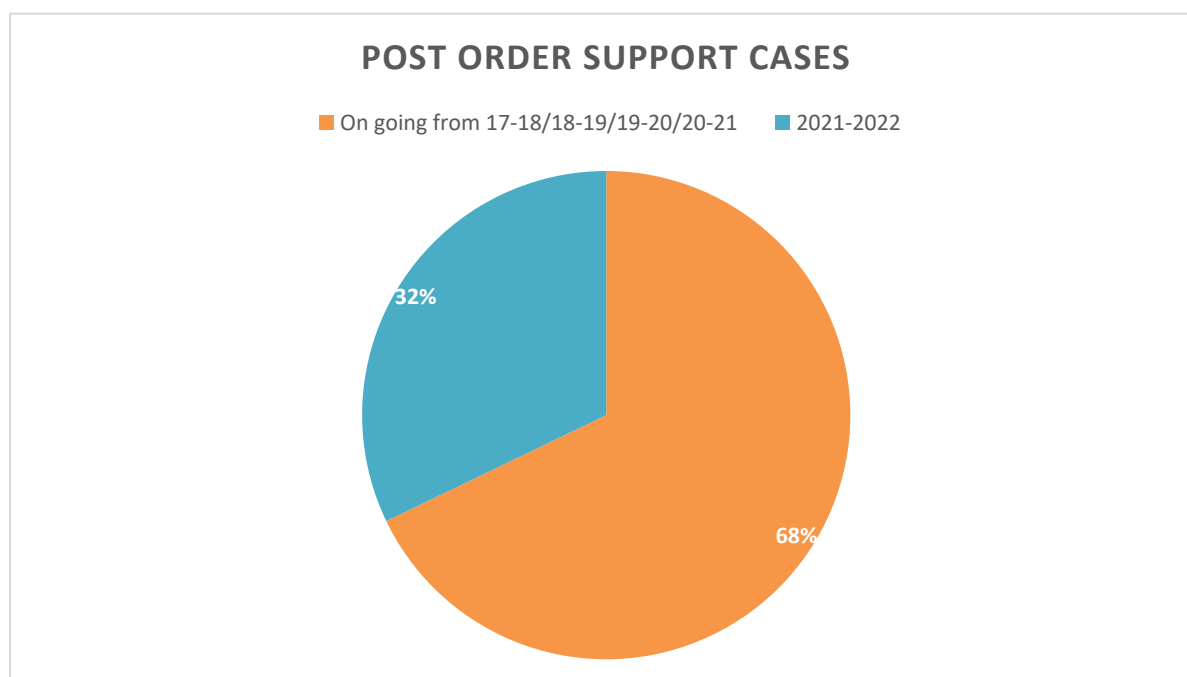
In previous annual reports the service has reported on the pre and post order support data together, however, separate data is now required for the ALB and to ensure consistency, this data will be presented separately for the mid-year and annual reports also. As has been the developing pattern with pre -order support, the work is increasing each year and as such it is important to monitor and analyse this area of work separately to inform future practice and development.



The current open case total is 370 – this total reflects the number of children receiving adoption support, both pre and post adoption order.

5f. Post-order support:

The number of open post-order cases is 308, which is made up of 99 referrals open in this annual review period and 209 ongoing cases as illustrated below:



5g. Assessments:

In this period the number of completed adoption support need assessments is slightly less than in 2020/2021, being 65. However, there are slightly more still active, 35 compared with 29 at this same period last year. Additionally, there have been 9 families withdraw from the assessment once commenced, which has previously been a rare occurrence.

Assessments:

01/04/2020 – 31/03/2021

Completed Assessments

Active Assessments

Withdrew at Assessment

Completed Assessments	62
Active Assessments	35
Withdrew at Assessment	9

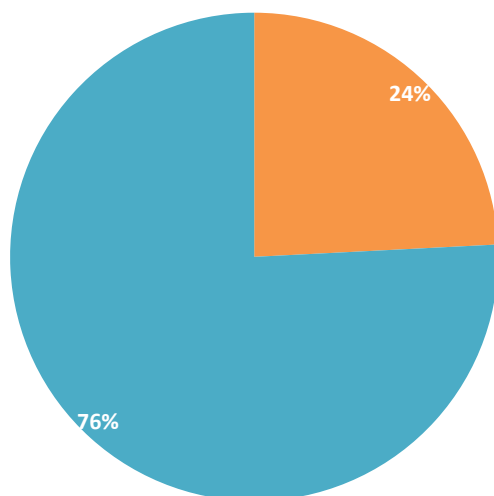
5h. Pre-order Support:

The number of open pre-order cases is 62, which is made up of 47 referrals open in this annual review period and 15 ongoing cases as illustrated below:

This total reflects the number of children receiving adoption support pre-adoption order. This could be allocated with direct support from within the team, ASF commissioned support packages or tracking through early placement with regular consultation reviews.

PRE-ORDER SUPPORT CASES

2019-20/2020-21 2021-2022



5i. Adoption Support Consultations:

01/04/2021 – 31/01/2022

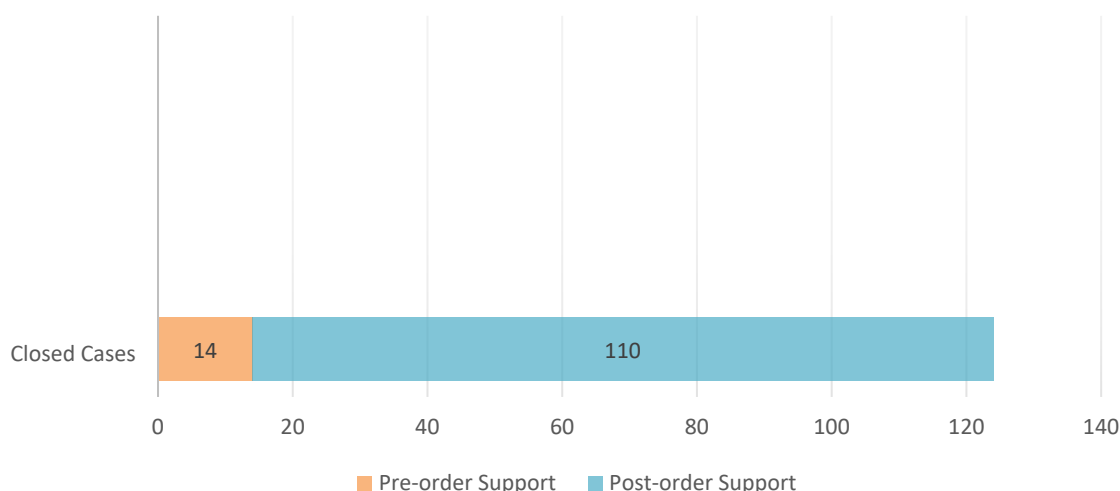
Adoption Support Consultations:

NFA following consultation, placement, or adoption order:

Receiving on-going Adoption Support

Adoption Support Consultations:	99 (for 120 children)
NFA following consultation, placement, or adoption order:	73
Receiving on-going Adoption Support	47
Total	120

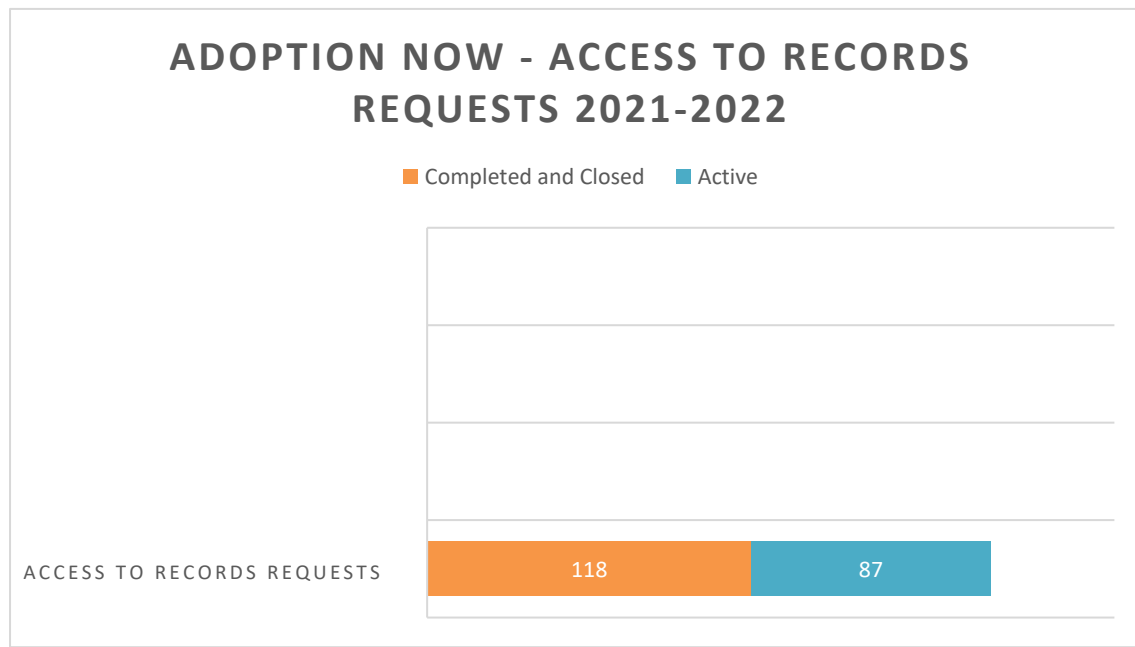
ADOPTION NOW - CLOSED SUPPORT CASES 2021-2022



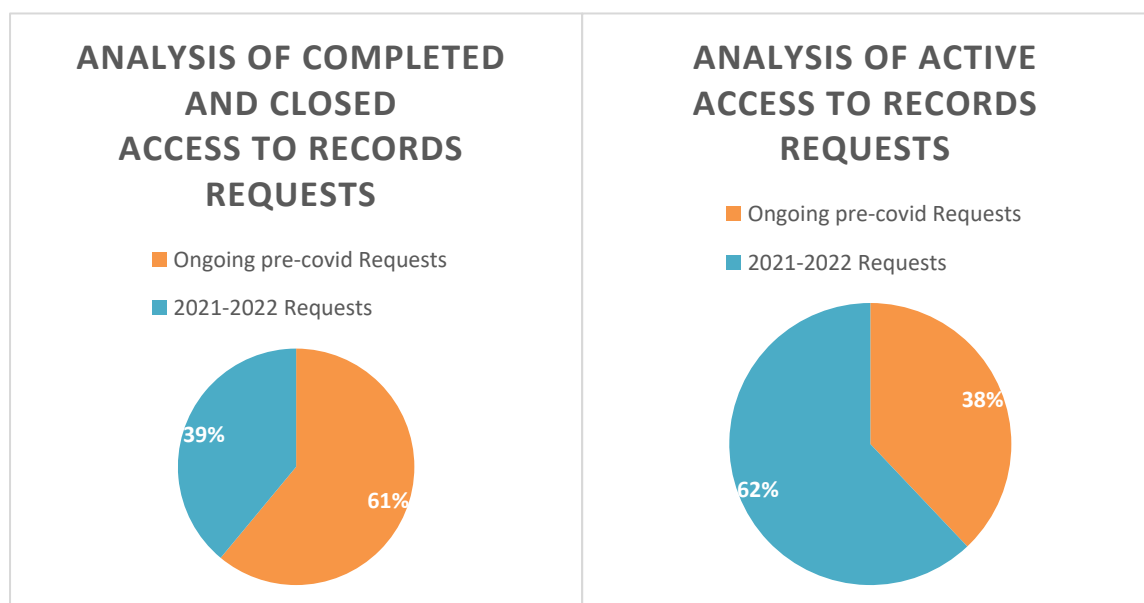
Whilst the number of closed cases has dropped in this year, from 162 to 124, the number of open cases has increased from 332 to 370, which is a significant increase.

5j. Access to Records:

As reported in the last annual review, this area of work has been significantly impacted upon due to the pandemic and having no or little access to local authority offices and files. A recovery plan for Access to Records work had commenced towards the end of 2020/21 and the illustration below shows a significant increase in completing these requests and indicates the success of the recovery plan as at the end of 2020/2021, the service had managed to complete 20 of the requests waiting and has successfully increased this to 118 completed requests through 2021/2022.



Adoption Now are seeing an increase in new requests for accessing records as is illustrated above and when comparing these figures to last year. At the end of 2020/21, whilst only 20 requests had been completed, there were 111 requests overall, whereas now, at the end of 2021/22 there have been 205 requests overall.



As can be seen in the charts above, a high percentage of requests on hold or received during the pandemic have now been completed, together with a significant number of new requests for 2021/22. Most requests ongoing are from 2021/22, indicating that the service is now successfully working through the backlog. Of the 38% ongoing, some relate to younger adopted adults, however, many relate to cases where the records are

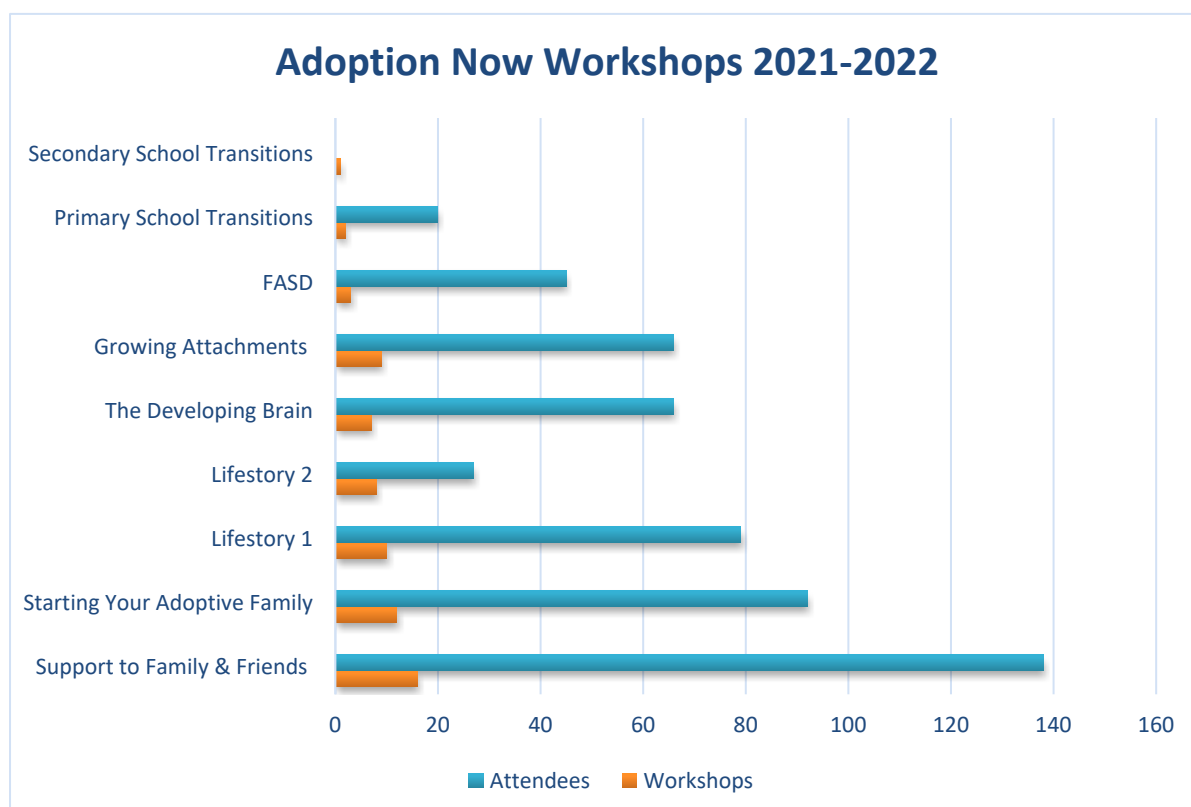
not held by one of the Adoption Now authorities and await a summary from another RAA. In some instances, this wait can be over 12 months.

5k. Core Offer Support - *Groups, Workshops and Events:*

Reaching Out – Adoption Now’s bulletin/newsletter that is now a permanent fixture and is published quarterly with some additional special editions.

Therapeutic Parenting Course – has run twice in 2020/21 with a total of 13 families. The numbers were required to be low to comply with social distancing rules, however, as the first course approaches for 2022/23, the maximum number of people per course is increasing.

Workshops – all virtual.



The table above shows the number of each workshop held over the last 12-month period, together with the total number of attendees overall for each workshop. In addition, there have been 12 bespoke sessions re life story and starting your adoptive family workshops where timeframes for matching and introductions have meant the next workshop would be difficult to attend.

What is not evident from the table is number of workshops cancelled due to low numbers or non-attendance – of which there has been at least one of each workshop topic and 2 cancelled for ‘Starting your Adoptive Family’. The review being undertaken in relation to workshops, is therefore not only focusing on virtual versus face-to-face but is also focusing on frequency and content, with a view to publishing a calendar for at least 6 monthly intervals, if not through to end of March 2023.

Support groups –

- Single adopter group – Monthly virtual meeting
- Nurture Group – Monthly and has returned to face-to-face with developments to return to 2 groups across the region. Currently, the group meets at a local park or play centre, however, a permanent venue for each group is now being sought.
- Young Person/Tweenies and Teen Groups – These are currently in development, with exploration of reforming 'Club Awesome', the over 5's group and the creation of a Teens Group. The focus group are looking to hold 2 events/activities for Adoption Now's young people over the summer period to gather views and create an established group. The focus group have also been liaising with nearby RAA's and have visited some established groups to inform the development.

Therapeutic Parenting Course – 5-day TP Course scheduled for July 2022 with families currently being identified. As part of this intervention, a regular call back/support group is in formation – this is yet to be named, however, this has been positively received and well attended with the next group having participants from the first and second therapeutic parenting course.

Birth Parent Support Development – As reported within the mid-year review, Adoption Now has worked in collaboration with Oldham's Aftercare team to provide an 8-week birth parent support group. This was specifically aimed to support care leavers aged 18-21. Additionally, Adoption Now linked up with a local group for Birth Parents called Rise Up. This is being run from a community-based Church in Bolton. The leader of the group is extremely experienced, who has shared skills and experience with the staff members setting up the Care Leavers Birth parent group in Oldham.

There is a small focus group evaluating and exploring how best to bring these experiences together with the PAC-UK birth parent support group with the longer-term vision of a support group for birth parents in each of Adoption Now's 6 local authorities, either linked to the RAA directly, like the Oldham Care Leavers project – or through a more loose affiliation, as with the Rise Up group but ensuring an established link with one another to maintain understanding, awareness of the services across our region and inform further developments.

The Letterbox Service – As previous reported, Adoption Now assumed responsibility for the Letterbox in late August 2021 with 2.5 letterbox and contact coordinators joining the service. The transition remains ongoing with all children, birth relatives and adoptive parents involved in the cases transferring from the local authorities now created on the Adoption Now LCS system. Files from Bury, Blackburn with Darwen and Rochdale have now fully transferred with Letterbox Pathways being created, with Bolton almost complete. The transfer of Tameside files will commence next and is likely to take a little longer as all the files are paper files, however, the scanning of files has commenced.

Processes and templates have been created and the first workshop with the Care Planning Team was held on 18th May 2022, to introduce any new aspects and support the set up. Further workshops are scheduled and will include the Recruitment Team once all the Care Planning workers have attended.

Whilst this transition has had many challenges, the feedback from families, birth and adoptive, is already positive, with many finding it easier to contact letterbox co-ordinators, receiving more timely responses and having any issues resolved.

Work continues in relation to LCS and the Letterbox Pathway with regular meetings with the Liquid Logic team to review and monitor the process and resolve any issues. The mechanism to open the Letterbox Pathway from a contact is not yet available, however, it is hoped this will be available soon to be able to collate data as new letterbox exchanges are set up. Accurate data in relation to the numbers of letterbox files transferred, archived, and created since Adoption Now have been responsible will be reported once the transition of all the files is complete.

6. Adoption Panels

Adoption panels continue to operate four times per month with an option to run a fifth panel if required. A bi-annual panel chairs report exists which summarises the work of the panels. In this period all panels have taken place remotely with a plan to return to face to face panels when it is safe to do so.

The panels quality assure paperwork being presented. 75 % of matches presented on Blackburn with Darwen children were of good quality or better during the year.

7. Inter-country adoption

Inter-country adoption services are rarely requested in Blackburn but the Local Authority has a statutory obligation to provide or commission a service. Blackburn with Darwen commission this service from The Inter Country Adoption Centre.

8. Participation of Young People

Services being designed are in line with the expressed wishes of some of our young people when they were consulted last year. Creative ways continue to be used to encourage participation from children who access post adoption support as well as those children who are awaiting adoption, especially, but not exclusively, those who are verbal.

9. Complaints

Adoption Now has not received any complaint in relation to Blackburn children or families.

10. Allegations

There have been no allegations in the last year.

11. Staffing

Over the last year the service has operated with a core team of 8 social workers,(fte equivalent), 0.8 family support worker, a Deputy team manager and a Team manager from Blackburn with Darwen. The staff are now seconded to Adoption Now and support a much larger service. During this period there have been 2 staff off long term sick likely to retire on grounds of ill health and also staff on maternity leave. These staff now work as part of Adoption Now and support a much larger service.

12. Budget

All Adoption Support fund applications are dealt with by Adoption Now.

The operational budgets supporting adoption are transferred to Adoption Now at the beginning of each financial year and combined with the budgets from the other five local authorities. This budget has not been increased this year which has put pressure on some budget lines and in particular the staffing budget lines.

There are costs associated with posts in the RAA that had no budget line to support them from the outset however, these are more than covered now by the income being generated and savings achieved from other budget lines as part of the economy of scale in bringing the six Local Authorities together.

It has been possible to meet the increasing financial demands due to income from adopters who are used by other agencies and pay a fee for that and due to some economies of scale when the RAA came into being.

The Adoption Now budget was underspent by £40,000 due to the invoice for new lap tops not coming in within the financial year. They will now be funded from the reserve budget. There is a financial plan in place to ensure that costs are covered until 2022/23 without incurring any additional costs to the Local Authorities.

A total of £131,087 was spent on placing Blackburn with Darwen children with outside agencies this year.

13. Team Development

A development plan exists within adoption now to ensure continuous improvements are made to the service. In addition, this is informed by adopter surveys carried out at least annually. The next one of these is due to go out in 2022.

Staff training remains a priority with full staff teams being trained in the Beth Nield research around moving children on. Training around modernising contact in adoption took place in November 2021. Managers attended Coram BAAF training on lessons from serious case reviews relating to children adopted or in Special guardianship or foster care placements. There are plans for a full staff event in June 2022 on the theme of Early Permanence placements for children and a plan to commission safeguarding refresher training for all staff. There is a block purchase of training from CVAA which allows staff to access courses specific to adoption and training has been delivered to marketing colleagues as part of the national recruitment work. In addition, staff have access to a range of training available through their local authorities.

One of the biggest challenges is to be approving more adopters for a wider range of children. Whilst numbers approved are over 30% more than the combined LA's were approving prior to the RAA coming into existence this is still not sufficient. There are currently adopters waiting however not for the children that currently need placements.

Support for adopters continues to grow and develop with the introduction of therapeutic parenting programmes and the increased use of virtual reality which adopters are finding extremely helpful.

As of 1st September 2021 Adoption Now took on responsibility for the adoption mailbox arrangements across the 6 Local Authorities. What will follow is a review of contact arrangements and the furthering of plans to modernise contact in adoption.

Regionally RAA 's are working together to deliver some training, develop best practise and look at service delivery that may benefit from economies of scale.

Head of Adoption Now continues to chair two ambition groups for the National Adopter Recruitment campaign and is on the governing body for the RAA National leaders' group. This ensures that Adoption Now has a national voice in policy development and planning.

14. Mentoring Service

The mentoring service now has a full complement of 13 volunteer adopters and a coordinator which is proving very successful and of benefit to adoptive parents. Mentors link in with prospective adopters from early on in their adoption journey and support through assessment and early placement. They can also link in with families struggling and needing support after the adoption order has been made.

Karen Barrick
June 2022

EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
LEAD OFFICERS:	Strategic Director of Children's & Education (DCS)
DATE:	Thursday, 13 October 2022

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Children, Young People and Education
WARD/S AFFECTED:	(All Wards);
KEY DECISION:	Y

SUBJECT: EB: The Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme 2022-2025

1. 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to seek agreement from the Executive Board to the proposed Family Hub developments and agree the distribution of the family hub allocated grant.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

- Note that Blackburn with Darwen will receive grant funding of between **£2.96m and £3.05m** over three financial years of 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25 to develop family hubs;
- Agree to the principle of the development of Family Hubs within Blackburn with Darwen in line with the submission to the Government and the conditions of the grant funding;
- Agree to allocate up to £500,000 of the Family Hub Grant over the 3 year period to 2024/25 to recruit a Change Management Transformation Team to support the development of Family Hubs;
- That subject to confirmation of the funding available, a further report be submitted to the Executive seeking approval to how the balance of grant funding will be used to deliver the Family Hub model.

3. BACKGROUND

In the 2021 Autumn Budget, the Government announced a three-year Family Hubs and Start for Life programme to deliver a step-change in outcomes for babies, children, young people, parents and carers.

The programme's core objective is to improve family service delivery, including Start for Life services, in areas with the highest levels of deprivation and disproportionately poor health and educational outcomes.

In addition the government wants to build the evidence base around the programme's implementation and impact in different contexts.

Based on these policy objectives Blackburn with Darwen has been selected in rank order using Income Deprivation Affecting Children Indices (IDACI) – Average Rank, subject to the additional condition that a minimum of 25% of local authorities from each rural-urban classification are pre-selected.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

The Family Hubs programme's objective is to join up and enhance services delivered through transformed family hubs in local authority areas, ensuring all parents and carers can access the support they need at the time that they need it. Through the programme, parents and carers should feel supported and empowered in caring for and nurturing their babies and children, ensuring they receive the best start in life. This in turn will improve health and education outcomes for babies and children and support them to thrive in later life.

To achieve this, funding will be provided to move to a family hub model, improve the universal Start for Life offer and transform family support particularly in local authority areas with high levels of deprivation and disproportionately poor health and educational outcomes, supporting the government's levelling up ambitions.

In summary, the programme will:

- Provide support to parents and carers so they are able to nurture their babies and children, improving health and education outcomes for all
- Support the reduction in inequalities in health and education outcomes for babies, children and families across England by ensuring that support provided is communicated to all parents and carers, including those who are hardest to reach and/or most need support
- Build the evidence base for what works when it comes to improving health and education outcomes for babies, children and families in different delivery contexts.

We will achieve this by investing the grant in:

Transforming the way services are designed and delivered

- We will use transformation funding to pay for the change process, supporting BwD to move to a family hub model. We will transition four children centres to become the family hubs within their local community by June 2023.
- As BwD has eight children's centres the four not identified as hubs will continue to provide any services currently offered with partnership working maintained and further encouraged. Although we are at pre-consultation stage, we do not anticipate any negative impact on the four centres not identified as family hubs and will continue to work with partners to ensure continuity of provision.
- We will see an increase in the number and range of services delivered through the family hub network, including co-location of services and professionals, where possible.
- Improving how our local services share information and work together to provide holistic support for families (to address the fragmented services families currently experience)

Universal Start for Life and family services

- Enhance and expand services which seek to identify and address needs at an early stage before more specialist support is required
- Ensuring that the Blackburn with Darwen Start for Life offer is clear, accessible and seamless, and voices of parents and carers are sought (through the development of local parent/carers panels) to influence the continuous improvement of the offer

Tailored support for vulnerable communities

- Ensuring additional targeted interventions which support vulnerable and under-served populations are included as part of the offer and delivered through the family hub model for example Blackburn with Darwen rural communities.

Workforce capacity and capability

- Create capacity through new workforce models that incorporate skill mix.
- Facilitating and enhancing the join-up of the multi-professional workforce to provide continuity of care to all families.
- Improving multi-agency training, addressing existing skill gaps, and ensuring empathy is at the heart of our practice.
- Increase the number of professionals and practitioners working in a whole-family, relational way that builds on families' existing strengths

Understanding what works and sharing best practice

- Robustly evaluating against a set of measurable quantitative and qualitative objectives in a variety of contexts
- Work with other local authorities to establishing communities of practice across the country to share best practice

Consultation with families, including young people and parents and carers to co design and improve services will be central to Blackburn with Darwen's approach to the development of the family hubs.

In the development of the Family hub model, we will ensure that equality impact assessments are part of all changes

The family hub model includes community ownership and co-production with families, children and young people. This programme provides the funding and we will establish Parent and Carer Panels focused on the period from conception to age two, which will play a key role in designing and continuously improving family services, through regular feedback from families from different communities and with different needs.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no policy implications at this time, however this will be considered at all stages of the development of the Family Hub model.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

We expect our total indicative allocation for the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme to be between **£2.96m and £3.05m** over three financial years of 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25. **Of this funding, 95% is for revenue expenditure and 5% is for capital expenditure.**

The Family Hubs Transformation Funding allocation of £500,000 will enable the recruitment of a change transformation management team to support the development of family hubs. The team may include

- Change and transformation manager
- Workforce development manager
- IT programme manager
- Data analyst
- Business admin support

This team will focus on the transition of four children centres to Family hubs and this will include digital transformation to improve data sharing between partners. The four hubs will be aligned with our neighbourhood model of working and will link with our Primary Care networks. Our integrated offer would provide Health, Care and Education services across the full 0- 19 age groups (25 with SEND) and become a 'front door' for families in their neighbourhoods.

Subject to confirmation of the Council's actual grant funding, a further report will be submitted to the Executive Board seeking approval to the allocation of the balance of funding in line with the Programme Strands referred to above.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council will need to comply fully with the grant conditions, otherwise there is the risk of clawback. Should the delivery and implementation of the Programme require external goods and services, the procurement must be in accordance with the Contract and Procurement Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There will be call on existing staff resource which will be absorbed through the Family hub Transformation grant allocation of £500,000

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 ☐ x Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 ☐ In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA link here)*

Option 3 ☐ In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA attachment*)

10. CONSULTATIONS

None arising from the contents of this report but we will be co-producing our offer with parents, carers, professionals, partners and young people as part of the transformation work.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

VERSION:	1
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CONTACT OFFICER:	Maria Nugent1
DATE:	12/09/2022
BACKGROUND PAPER:	

EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



REPORT OF: Executive Member for Digital and Customer Services

LEAD OFFICERS: Strategic Director Resources (SIRO)

DATE: 13 October 2022

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED: Digital and Customer Services

WARD/S AFFECTED: All

KEY DECISION: YES ☐ NO ☒

SUBJECT: Coroner's Service – Update Report

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To report on the Coroner's Service for 2021-22.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

- Notes the contents, reporting on the Lancashire and Blackburn with Darwen Coroner's Service during 2021-23.
- Notes that the use of Blackburn Town Hall facilities by the Coroner has resumed for routine inquests relating to BwD cases.

3. BACKGROUND

Since 2018 the merged coronial service (comprising the former Coronal Districts of Blackburn with Darwen, Hyndburn & Ribble Valley, Preston & West Lancashire and East Lancashire) has been managed by Lancashire County Council (LCC) under a revised administrative arrangement. LCC is the 'relevant authority' under the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 for the Lancashire and Blackburn with Darwen jurisdiction. The Coroner's Service covers 4 prisons, 3 teaching hospitals, 2 general hospitals, a neonatal unit, specialist orthopaedic centre, mental health facilities and major transport network.

LCC and BwD entered into a Cost Sharing Agreement, which sets out the provision of the service, accountability, responsibilities, monitoring arrangements and financial arrangements.

As part of the arrangements under the agreement, LCC is required to submit to BwD budget monitoring information and forward the annual statistics provided the Coroner.

Since the merger, both Lancashire County Council and Blackburn with Darwen Council have benefited from savings due to economies of scale and new ways of working, with no impact on the

service. However, these savings have decreased over the years due to the inflationary rises and the demand for more detailed investigations and hearings. In addition to this, Medical Examiners who deal with all hospital deaths are expected to review community deaths by April 2023.

Although the introduction of the Medical Examiner's Service has seen a reduction in the number of referrals to the Coroner, the referrals that are received for hospital deaths have been more complex in nature, often requiring increased investigation and frequently needing an independent expert. As a result, the service is forecasting an increase on the budgeted costs over the coming year and beyond.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

Despite the impact of the pandemic, the Coroner's Service continued to improve and provide an efficient and cost-effective service in the Lancashire and Blackburn with Darwen Coroner area.

Staffing

The Lancashire and Blackburn with Darwen Coroner's Service is headed by Dr James Adeley, HM Senior Coroner, and 2 full time Area Coroners (Mr Richard Taylor and Mr Christopher Long). The Service is also supported by 9 assistant Coroners, a local authority Coroner Services Manager, Coroner's Support Team Manager and 7 administrative staff. The workload of the Coroners is increasing due to increasing demands, the increasing complexity of individual inquests and new areas of inquest work being created due to the establishment of bodies such as the Health Service Investigation Board, who are now reviewing all full term baby deaths and maternal deaths.

To meet this rising workload, the service have recently agreed an increase of two Coroners Officers and will now have 14 to support the jurisdiction. The Coroner's Officers are employed and managed by Lancashire Constabulary but half funded by local authority, with around 3.5 Coroner's Officers dealing with the deaths in Blackburn with Darwen. The Coroner's Officers are based in the hospitals with a total of 5 being located at Royal Blackburn Hospital. Casual Court Clerks are employed by the local authority (LCC) to run the inquests.

There is currently a JNC consultation in relation to the Coroners pay offer for 2022/23. LCC are responding to the consultation expressing concerns over budget pressure should the proposal of 8% be agreed in negotiations. Any confirmed pay increase will impact the BwD recharge for the staffing costs of the Coroner's Service. An 8% pay award would see a potential increase of £4,838 for BwD.

A swearing In ceremony for new Coroners joining the jurisdiction was held in February 2022. The ceremony was officiated by the High Sheriff of Lancashire, Mr Edwin Booth, CBE, and was attended by the Mayor and Mayoress.

The Out of Hours Service continues to run smoothly with no significant issues being raised.

Management Information

For BwD, the Coroner's Service dealt with 690 deaths during 2021/22. The percentage of causes of death found from the CT scan facility remains high at 93.4% for 2021/22.

Between April and June 2022, the Coroner's Service dealt with 172 deaths, and the percentage of causes of death found as a result of a CT scan was again over 90%. Currently the time from the death being reported to receiving the cause of death from the CT scan is around 48 hours, with 47% of all deaths requiring a post mortem report within 7 days.

Since its commencement in 2018, the CT scanner continues to operate well and the ability to establish a cause of death via CT scanning is over 90%. The CT scanning service is delivered and staffed by NHS staff, and like all coronial services is funded by the local authority. The scanner is located at Royal Preston Hospital, a central location for all the mortuaries within Lancashire.

Inquests

During the pandemic, inquests continued to be heard but faced various problems, including the availability of Doctors whose clinical work had to be prioritised. As a result a backlog had developed, which is in the process of being cleared and is expected to be completed by 2023. However, a significant challenge has been the loss of 50% of the Coroner's Officers who run the investigations prior to the inquest due to retirement and leaving the service.

The Coroner's Service welcomes the opportunity to return to the BwD Council Chamber and have inquests already booked into the court diary. They will be using their Casual Court Clerks to support the inquests, including the arrangements for the family and other visitors attending the hearing.

Medical Examiner Service & Health Service Investigation Board

East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust introduced the Medical Examiner service as an independent review system to provide greater safeguarding to the public around certification of death. It is currently non-statutory and its aims include scrutinising all 'non-coronial' deaths and ensuring the appropriate referral to the coroner. At present, the Medical Examiners are only looking at hospital deaths but it is expected that in April 2023 they will include 'community deaths'. Since its introduction the Medical Examiner service has been identifying serious medical cases being referred to the coroner for investigation, and less complex cases being removed from the Coroner's Service. The Senior Coroner continues to work with the Medical Examiner at East Lancashire Hospitals Trust to agree community deaths that should automatically be referred to the coroner and those that should first be considered by the Medical Examiner.

In addition, the Health Service Investigation Board (HSIB) continues to investigate any death of a baby born during delivery, requiring additional expert evidence from both obstetricians and paediatricians with some additional costs.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The merger saw LCC assuming the role of becoming the relevant local authority responsible under the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 Act.

The funding for the jurisdiction is met by LCC with Blackburn with Darwen Council (BwD) contributing an agreed percentage in relation to the operating costs for the BwD area. BwD also contribute a percentage towards the cost of the Senior Coroner and one Area Coroner who is responsible for dealing with the workload in the BwD area.

The Council need to monitor that the Coroners' Service continues to provide an efficient and cost-effective service in the BwD area. In addition, the Council need to ensure that Coroner's Service remain supportive of the local, cultural, community and in particular religious needs and expectations of the residents in the BwD area.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Under the Cost Sharing Agreement Lancashire County Council (LCC) provide Coroner's Services in Blackburn with Darwen for which BwD is recharged a proportion of LCC's overall costs of the Coroner's Service, under a Cost Sharing Agreement. These costs are:

- 50% of the costs associated with coroner's officers, training expenses, IT costs, pathologist fees, histology fees, mortuary staff fees, toxicology fees, witness expenses, coroner's juror fees, undertaker fees and hire of venues for inquest hearings for BwD cases
- 23% of the costs associated with staffing including the Senior Coroner, 1 Area Coroner, 1 Senior Democratic Services Officer and all administrative support based at Faraday Court.
- Other such costs agreed from time to time.

2021/22

BwD contribution - £291,886.84

This is an increase from 2020/21 (£275,501.32) but less than the estimated recharge (£295,850). The contribution includes the repayment of a credit (£4,525.84) that had been given in 2018/19 on the assumption that this amount would be recoverable from Lancashire Constabulary in respect of the Home Office post mortems. However, it has not been possible to recover this amount from Lancashire Constabulary.

BwD Council Chamber is now available to hold inquests, and therefore any cost for hiring other venues for BwD cases will be less.

2022/23 - Q1 (01.04.22 – 30.06.22)

BwD contribution - £78,106.25

For 2022/23, the Coroners Service is working on an overall budget of £316,650.00 for the provision of supplies and services together with the re-charge of staffing costs @ 23% being around £148,600.00, plus other costs (£5,500). It is therefore, currently estimated that the BwD re-charge for the 2022/23 financial year will be in the region of £312,425.00.

Although the spend in 2021/22 increased and the projected spend for 2022/23 will again exceed the allocated budget, the cost to BwD is still significantly less than before the merger took place. Prior to the merger the overall cost of operating the Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley jurisdiction was over £800,000 of which circa £400K was contributed by Lancashire County Council for the Services covering Hyndburn & Ribble Valley.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Local authorities have a legal requirement to resource the Coroner's Service to enable the Coroner to carry out their investigations into deaths that are unnatural, suspicious or where the cause of death is unknown.

The role of the HM Coroner is a statutory role. The Coroners and Justice Act 2009 (Alteration of Coroner Areas) (No. 2) Order 2017 came into force on 1 December 2017 and formed the merged coroner area of Lancashire and Blackburn with Darwen.

Lancashire County Council are the 'relevant authority' for the delivery of coronial services for Blackburn with Darwen, and they operate the service under the terms of a Cost Sharing Agreement with Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, referred to in this report. Under the agreement BwD has responsibility to reimburse a proportion of the costs incurred and that attributable to the Coronal Jurisdiction of Blackburn with Darwen.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Resources for the delivery of the Coronial Service are provided under the Cost Sharing agreement by Lancashire County Council. The Deputy Director, Legal & Governance and a finance officer monitor service and costs in accordance with the agreed protocols between the Councils.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 ☒ Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 ☐ In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA link here)*

Option 3 ☐ In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA attachment)*

10. CONSULTATIONS

Consultations were conducted in advance of the merger in 2017.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

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CONTACT OFFICER:	Asad Laher, Deputy Director, Legal & Governance
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DATE:	3 October 2022
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BACKGROUND PAPER:	
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EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Finance and Governance
LEAD OFFICERS:	Strategic Director of Resources (SIRO)
DATE:	Thursday, 13 October 2022

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Finance and Governance
WARD/S AFFECTED:	(All Wards);
KEY DECISION:	Y

SUBJECT: Procurement of the Advice Services

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The current contract for the provision of Advice Services in the borough is due to finish at the end of September 2022. As an interim measure to ensure the existing contract can be reviewed and the specification developed for future years, the existing contract has been extended until the end of June 2023.

1.2 An independent external review of the current service and internal consultation with key departments has provided valuable insight into how the new contract should be designed for the forthcoming years.

1.3 This report seeks approval for the commencement of the procurement process and the award of the new contract for Advice Service provision. In addition, the procurement will include the delivery of housing support to residents covered in the Supported Accommodation Improvement Programme.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

- 2.1 Approve the procurement strategy outlined in this paper and;
- 2.2 Notes that following procurement the Strategic Director of Resources shall subsequently award a contract to an appropriately qualified organisation to deliver Debt, Welfare and Housing Advice Services, and partner with the council, in the delivery of the Supported Housing Improvement Programme.

3. BACKGROUND

The Advice Service is currently managed by a consortium of Shelter and the Women's Centre and is co-located within Blackburn Central Library, Darwen Town Hall and the Women's Centre. The current service specification includes the provision of general debt and welfare advice, and more specialist casework.

The ending of the current contract has provided an opportunity to undertake an external review of the service and consider how the specification should be designed from 2023.

Whilst the external review recognised the high quality service provision and the expertise of organisations delivering the service on behalf of the council, it was acknowledged that improvements could be made to integrate the service into the council's wider objectives.

Our overall aims of the new contract will be to continue to have a high quality co-ordinated and uniform advice service across the Borough that has a more robust governance structure to ensure there is closer working with all council departments.

The procurement process for the Advice Service coincides with the commencement of the government funded Supported Housing Improvement Programme. Included in the delivery plan is for the procurement of a partner organisation to assist with the support of individuals who reside in supported accommodation. The requirements for the provision of both Advice Services and the Improvement Programme will therefore be procured together in one contract award.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

4.1 Service specification

The revised Advice Service specification will continue to require the provider to deliver an all-round service that incorporates the preventative and early advice many customers to the service need, and, the high level expert casework for the more complex cases.

During the review of the current service provision and data, it has become evident that the majority of the customers have housing needs in addition to Debt and Welfare requirements. The new specification will therefore incorporate housing advice to ensure a full rounded service is delivered to the residents of the borough. Failure to incorporate this aspect of support would adversely affect customer outcomes, and potentially result in many customers being referred to other providers to receive housing advice.

4.2 Accommodation

The location of the Advice Service has been discussed for a number of years and it is expected that in the immediate future at least, the delivery of the advice service will remain at Blackburn Central Library.

It is hoped that an alternative location can identified at some time in the future. To ensure that this can take place, the contract will reflect the council's ambition.

4.3 Delivery approach

Where potential organisations do not have all of the necessary skills and experience to deliver against the specification, they will be encouraged to develop a co-ordinated, consortia approach to help deliver comprehensive advice services.

4.4 Tender and Timescales

The tender process will be an open procedure and be evaluated on the basis of 85% quality and 15% social value. The detail of the evaluation criteria will be approved by the Head of Service – Contracts and Procurement.

It is expected that the procurement of the new service will be completed by the end of November 2022. This time scale allows for the Supported Housing Improvement Programme element to commence in December 2023, and give any new supplier of the main Advice Service the opportunity to prepare for the commencement of the contract in July 2023, and, if the current provider is unsuccessful, an appropriate period of time to plan relocation.

The contract will also allow for the expansion of debt, welfare and housing advice resources if additional funding is made available by the council.

4.5 Contract Length

The main contract will be for a 3 year period with the option to extend for 1 plus 1 years.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no policy implications arising directly from this report.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no plans to change the current Advice Service budget of £150,000 per annum.

The Supported Housing element will be £120,000 per annum for 2 years, 4 months. This funding will be allocated to BwD Council from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Procurements will be undertaken in line with the Council's Contract Procurement Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. Contracts will be in a form approved by legal officers in the Contracts and Procurement team. It is likely that award of the contract to another provider would result in a transfer of staff pursuant to the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no resource implications arising directly from this report.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 ☒ Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 ☐ In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA link here*)

Option 3 ☐ In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA attachment*)

10. CONSULTATIONS

There are no consultation requirements arising from this report.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

VERSION:	1
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CONTACT OFFICER:	Andy Ormerod
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DATE:	13 th October 2022
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BACKGROUND PAPER:	
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EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Finance and Governance
LEAD OFFICERS:	Director of Finance
DATE:	Thursday, 13 October 2022

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Finance and Governance
WARD/S AFFECTED:	(All Wards);
KEY DECISION:	Y

SUBJECT: Supported Housing Improvement Programme

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In July 2022, the Government announced a new programme of work and available funding to support councils with improving Supported Accommodation.

The Council was invited along with 3 other Local Authorities to bid for the new funding prior to the national roll out of the programme. Our successful bid has secured £946,000 for the new programme over the periods October 2022 – March 2023, April 2023 – March 2024, and April 2024 – March 2025.

This report seeks approval of the commencement of the activities outlined below that will be undertaken during the two and half year programme.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

2.1 Agrees to the commencement of work and allocation of resources to deliver the programme, including establishing the necessary budgets as part of the Council's General Fund Revenue Budget;

2.2 Give delegated authority to the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and Governance, to approve the procurement strategy and subsequently award a contract to a partner organisation to assist with the delivery of the programme outcomes.

2.3 Give delegated authority to the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and Governance, to approve the procurement strategy and subsequently award a contract to an appropriately qualified organisation to undertake a Strategic Review of Supported Accommodation within the borough.

2.4 Agrees to the monitoring of the programme through an annual progress report.

3. BACKGROUND

Blackburn with Darwen has historically had high numbers of short term Supported Accommodation within the borough. In September 2020, the council was invited by the Department of Communities and Local Government to submit a bid for a pilot scheme to examine the property standards, support quality for residents and value for money to the tax payer for this sector of housing. The information and data collated during the pilot has been invaluable to the now Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, who following the allocation of further funding asked Blackburn with Darwen to consider submitting a further longer-term bid for the period October 2022 – March 2025.

The newly funded programme will build on the work of the earlier pilot and seek to improve the property conditions and support delivered to residents by the establishment of a Core Team who will seek to proactively engage with residents and enforce standards through increased scrutiny and enforcement activity.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

The first pilot in September 2020 provided valuable information and intelligence on all providers of Supported Accommodation in the borough. This new programme of work will seek to focus exclusively on the short-term provision in the Borough via large Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) models.

The funding will provide for the establishment of a Core Team within the Benefit Service of the Council. This Team will coordinate joint activities with colleagues in Housing Needs and Housing Standards Teams, and oversee the case management of vulnerable residents by a voluntary sector partner.

Our activities and programme of work outlined in our successful bid include the following:

4.1 Undertaking regular inspections of Supported Accommodation properties

This activity will see the scheduled inspection of the nine properties outlined in our bid. This will be undertaken jointly by Housing Standards, Housing Needs, the Benefits service, our voluntary sector partner, and the Fire Service. Any required enforcement action will be co-ordinated across all parties.

4.2 Monitoring of the standards of support and outcomes for residents

The team will proactively obtain feedback on the standard and depth of support offered to residents. This feedback will be obtained in face to face settings, following which, we will work with providers to improve standards, however, where appropriate, action will be taken.

4.3 Improving engagement with residents and raising claimant expectations

One of the biggest challenges to improving the standard of Supported Accommodation in the borough is obtaining sufficient feedback and information from residents regards standards. We will therefore be engaging with hundreds of residents to better understand the reality facing those individuals. We have seen many residents move into this type of short term accommodation who then become long term residents. It is hoped that once we have established a rapport with residents in this type of accommodation we will be better placed to identify issues and raise expectations.

4.4 Audit of Supported Accommodation providers

The culmination of our programme of work will allow for the regular audit of Supported Accommodation providers. The additional information collated will allow objective analysis of individual providers and the opportunity to make an assessment. Where failures are identified, warning notices will be issued, however, should poor standards continue, it will be in our power to suspend the payment of claims and potentially withdraw the supported status of a provider.

4.5 Introduction of Case Management Officers

The earlier pilot in 2020 identified a number of residents in short term accommodation who with additional support could move out of the Supported accommodation into main stream accommodation. The newly created case management roles will work with residents to support them with the challenges of relocating into new accommodation, in addition, there will be continued ongoing support for a period of 3-9 months following the move. These roles will be undertaken by a suitably qualified and appropriate voluntary organisation that will be appointed from a procurement exercise in October/November 2022.

4.6 A comprehensive Strategic review of Supported Accommodation

To ensure that we have an accurate and complete understanding of the borough's current and future Supported Accommodation needs, a comprehensive strategic review will be undertaken. To assist with this review, consultancy support will be sought from a suitably qualified organisation.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no policy implications arising directly from this report.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council has received confirmation of the funding allocation of £946,000. This funding will ensure the financial costs of the programme are fully met by the Department of Levelling up, Housing and Communities.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Procurements will be undertaken in line with the Council's Contract Procurement Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. Contracts will be in a form approved by legal officers in the Contracts and Procurement team.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The funding from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities will be used to backfill all Blackburn with Darwen resources allocated to this programme of work, and the cost of procuring a voluntary sector partner and consultancy support.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 ☒ Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 ☐ In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA link here)*

Option 3 ☐ In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA attachment)*

10. CONSULTATIONS

There are no consultation requirements from this report.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

VERSION:	1
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CONTACT OFFICER:	Andy Ormerod
DATE:	
BACKGROUND PAPER:	



REPORT OF: Executive Member for Finance and Governance

LEAD OFFICER: Director of Finance

DATE: 13th October 2022

PORTFOLIOS AFFECTED: All

WARDS AFFECTED: All

KEY DECISION: Y

TITLE OF REPORT: Development of the General Fund Revenue Budget 2023/24

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Executive Board with an update on the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2023/26 and to provide details of a programme of activity to inform the development of the Council's Budget for 2023/24 and future years.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Executive Board:-

- a) note the key risks to the delivery of the budget in 2022/23 and that these will be subject to consideration as part of the regular Budget Monitoring reports submitted to the Executive Board;
- b) note the uncertainty with the funding outlook for the Council, not least the limited progress on Local Government Finance reforms and the possibility that these may not take place before the next General Election in 2024;
- c) note the update to the Medium Term Financial Plan for 2023/26 as shown at **Appendix A** and that a further update will be provided later in the year once details of the Council's funding settlement are known;
- d) note the scenario analysis shown at **Appendix C and D** which models 'worst'/'best' case scenarios around the baseline MTFP as part of the assessment of potential risks facing the Council;
- e) note the potentially significant financial impact of the proposals for the National Living Wage and the financial impact of the Social Care reforms and that an update on these matters be provided in future reports on the MTFP;

- f) in accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules acknowledge the work that has started on the development of options under the various Workstreams identified at **Appendix E** and that Portfolio Holders continue to develop draft proposals to meet the funding gap set out in the report for the period to 2025/26 with any such proposals considered by the Executive Board in due course;
- g) note the timetable set out in the report for the development of the Council's Budget for 2023/24.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At the meeting of the Executive Board on 9th June 2022, Councillors considered a report on the development of the Council's General Fund Revenue Budget for 2023/24. The report set out details of a revised Medium Term Financial for the period to 2025/26 which indicated a funding shortfall of c£13.2m over the period.
- 3.2 As set out in the report, it was resolved that a further update on the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan for 2023/26 be provided to the Executive Board reflecting the latest assumptions and information available to the Council. This report forms that update.

4. RATIONALE

- 4.1 The development of the budget is a key element of the Council's financial governance processes. Starting this work early in the current financial year will provide adequate time to develop a range of options for Councillors to consider when setting the budget for 2023/24.
- 4.2 It is also worthwhile noting that, as part of the new approach to the assessment of the Council's Value for Money arrangements, the Council's External Auditors assess what arrangements the Council has in place to deliver a balanced budget including the adequacy of savings schemes, extent to which there is consultation with stakeholders etc. It is important, therefore, for the Council to have developed **a robust and deliverable set of options** for achieving a balanced and sustainable budget over the medium term to avoid any adverse commentary in the Auditor's report on Value for Money that may lead to more directive action.

5. KEY ISSUES

Funding Outlook

- 5.1 Any consideration of the Council's Financial Strategy and Medium Term Financial Plan must be undertaken in the context of the funding outlook for Local Government and what that means for the Council.
- 5.2 Since the Spring Statement in March 2022, the Government has not provided any further update on the likely level of funding available to Local Government from 2023/24 onwards. Indeed, given the resignation of the Prime Minister in early June and the ensuing Conservative Leadership Election, there has been little in the form of policy announcements to do with Local Government Finance in recent months. In particular, there appears to be no update as yet on the various proposed Local Government Finance Reforms (Fair Funding Review, Business Rates Retention Review, review of New Homes Bonus).

- 5.3 With the recent formation of a new Government in early September and with a new Secretary of State for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), in all likelihood there would appear to be insufficient time for the Government to consult properly on what would, potentially, be significant changes to the redistribution of funding between Councils. These reforms are, therefore, unlikely to take place.
- 5.4 Of more concern, however, is the impact on the public finances of the Government's response to the Cost of Living Crisis and the prospect that the UK economy going into a recession. As set out in the so called 'Mini-Budget' announcement on 23rd September, the Government has committed to substantial additional borrowing both to provide relief to households and businesses for the cost of energy and to cutting tax for individuals and businesses as a way of stimulating growth in the economy. The success or otherwise of these measures will only be seen in time but the sustainability of this approach may have a bearing on the current level of public expenditure and, therefore, the funding received by the Council.
- 5.5 At the time of writing, the Chancellor of Exchequer is expected to set out the Government's Medium-Term Fiscal Plan on 23rd November. This is intended to include a set of fiscal rules including ensuring that the national debt falls as a share of GDP in the medium term and may give a signal to the future course of public spending. That said, when announcing that, the Government also confirmed that it will keep to the spending settlement announced in the Spending Review last year despite the significant increase in inflation since and the recent turmoil in the financial markets.
- 5.6 For Local Government, the next key event is the Provisional Local Government Funding Settlement which is due in December. As the Settlement for 2022/23 is for one-year only, there is currently no clear indication what the likely Settlement for 2023/24 onwards will be. What does appear to be proceeding is the Business Rates Revaluation 2023. This will update business rates rateable values from April 2023 (based on rental market information at April 2021). The impact of this on the Council and Business Ratepayers in Blackburn with Darwen is not yet known although, as with previous Revaluations, the Government is expected to put in place transitional measures to dampen the impact on businesses and make neutral the impact on Local Authorities.

Budget 2022/23

- 5.7 At the last meeting of the Executive Board, Councillors received a report providing details of a budget monitoring exercise undertaken at the end of June 2022. This indicated a forecast overspend of £8.1m for 2022/23.
- 5.8 Work will continue in the current financial year to find ways of containing this overspend wherever possible.

Update of Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/26

- 5.9 Since the meeting of Executive Board in June 2022 when the Medium Term Financial Plan (MFTP) was last considered, and recognising that the Council is operating in a dynamic environment, work has continued to update the Council's MFTP for the period to 2025/26. A summary of the updated MFTP is provided in the Table 1 below with a more detailed analysis provided at **Appendix A:-**

Table 1: Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/26

	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000
Portfolio Budgets	133,880	133,905	133,560	133,560
Other Corporate I & E	16,123	23,009	31,305	39,763
Net Revenue Expenditure	150,003	156,914	164,865	173,323
Less Core Funding	(82,626)	(84,717)	(85,618)	(86,537)
Less Council Tax	(54,231)	(62,153)	(65,421)	(67,696)
Shortfall before Reserves	13,146	10,044	13,826	19,090
Change in Specific Reserves	(13,146)	(1,388)	(960)	(500)
Change in GF Balance	-	-	-	-
Funding 'Gap'	-	8,656	12,866	18,590
In Year Funding 'Gap'	-	8,656	4,210	5,724

See Appendix A

5.10 **Appendix B** provides an analysis of the movement in the MTFP shown above when compared to the last MTFP reported to the Executive Board on 9th June 2022.

5.11 As the table indicates, the forecast funding gap for the period to 2025/26 is now estimated to be £18.6m. The key changes to the MTFP include:-

- a further update to the cost of pay reflecting:-
 - the current pay offer from the Employers-side in 2022/23 and its effect on the pay bill in subsequent financial years. The pay offer comprises in the main a cash lump sum of £1,925 on each point of the pay scale. At SCP1 (the lowest grade), this equates to a salary increase of 10.5% whereas at SCP64 (the highest (non Chief Officer) grade), this equates to a 2.7% salary increase. On average for the Council, including the impact on both National Insurance Contributions and Employers Pension Contributions, the Pay Offer equates to an increase in salaries of 7.4%;
 - a reduction in the cost of National Insurance Contributions following the Government's recent decision to cancel the increase that was implemented in April 2022. This change takes effect from 6th November 2022 and will have a knock-on impact from 2023/24 onwards with the cancellation of the Health and Social Care Levy also;
- the deletion of the contingency (c£1m) held for general other costs to provide some resources to meet the additional cost of the pay offer referred to above.

5.12 These and the other assumptions underpinning the MTFP will remain under review as the financial year progresses.

Key Areas of Uncertainty

5.13 The MTFP is a forecast of the Council's financial position over the period to 2025/26. At this stage, there remain a number of matters where insufficient information is available but which are likely to have a significant impact on the MTFP. These include:-

Delivery of the Budget in 2022/23

5.14 Delivering the budget in 2022/23 is critical to the sustainability of the Council's financial position. As indicated above, on the basis of the Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring exercise, the Council is forecasting an overspend of £8.1m. An update on some of the key risks to the delivery of the budget is provided below:-

- **Implementation of savings** – the Council agreed savings totalling £2.065m to balance the budget for the year. All of these savings were permanent reductions in the budget and to the extent that they are not delivered in full or at all, there will be an additional budget pressure for 2023/24 onwards. At this stage, it is expected that savings of £1.799m will be implemented, a shortfall of £0.266m attributed to Children's Services;
- **Impact of the 'Cost of Living' Crisis** – as the Executive Board will be aware, the 'Cost of Living' crisis has both a direct impact on the Council's activities – higher cost of supplies and services, increase costs of capital schemes, reduced footfall at facilities such as the Markets, Leisure Centres impacting on the Council's income streams – and indirectly through the impact on residents and businesses affecting their ability to pay Council Tax and Business Rates;
- **Pay Award in 2022/23** – as indicated above, negotiations on the pay award for 2022/23 have not yet concluded. The Employers-side have made an offer which equates to an additional cost to the Council of c7% (against a budget of 2%). This is currently the subject of consultation between Unions and their Members, the outcome of which is unlikely to be known before the end of October 2022;
- **Energy Inflation** – the Council's cost of energy has increased significantly and is now estimated to be £3.916m in 2022/23 (in 2021/22, it was £1.447m) reflecting price increases earlier in the year. On the basis of Quarter 1 budget monitoring, there are no specific concerns to raise at this stage. Equally, the Council will benefit from the Energy Bill Relief Scheme to be implemented by the Government from 1st October and which will last until March 2023;
- **Investment in Children's Services** – The Executive will be aware of the outcome of the Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services earlier this year and the decision of the Executive Board to invest an additional £1m in the service to accelerate improvements in the service so that better outcomes can be achieved. This is particularly the case with the Leaving Care Service where the bulk of the additional funding is being invested. As indicated at the time of this investment, this is a matter that will need to remain under review as the year progresses;
- **Demand for Adult and Children's Social Care** – whilst demand pressures in Adult Social Care to date are being contained within existing budgets, the continuing fragility of the health system means there is the real potential for this to change. Indeed, with the onset of winter, the pressure on the Council's services is likely to increase and will need to be monitored closely.

As indicated in the Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring report, current demand on Children's Service means that the Service is forecast to overspend by c£2.3m on Placements. Work is underway to review all Placements to ensure they are appropriate and that they represent value for money for the outcomes achieved;

- **Impact of Covid-19** – whilst the rates of infection for Covid-19 continue to fall, the risk of new variants remain and with all legal restrictions lifted, there is potential for surge infections to occur. The Government has provided no new funding to Local Authorities in 2022/23 to deal with Covid-19, so any activity undertaken will have to be funded from within existing resources.

- 5.15 These and other matters will be considered in more detail as part of the regular budget monitoring reports to the Executive Board as the financial year progresses.

Funding Settlement

- 5.16 Given the funding settlement for 2022/23 is for one-year only, and that there appears to be a diminishing prospect of the Local Government Finance reforms referred to above, it is difficult to estimate the likely level of funding the Council will receive from 2023/24 onwards. Whilst the amount of funding from Business Rates and Revenue Support Grant appear relatively stable, it is not clear how the Government might choose to distribute the Services Grant or whether the New Homes Bonus will continue in any form at all.

Future Pay Awards

- 5.17 As the Executive Board may be aware, the Pay Award for 2021/22 has only recently been settled with no details as yet about the Pay Offer for 2022/23. It is likely that, given the current 'cost of living' crisis, the pay negotiations for 2022/23 will be as protracted as they were in the last financial year and there will be significant pressure on Local Government Employers to agree a pay award in line with the rate of inflation. And unless inflation is brought under control, there is every likelihood that the pressure on Pay Awards will continue to grow.

Inflation

- 5.18 As in previous years, other than for Pay, Utilities and Commissioned Providers Fees, budgets are assumed to be cash limited and not increased by inflation. This is a matter that remains under review given the prevailing rate of inflation not least because in the case of some budgets, this may not be a sustainable position.

National Living Wage and Impact on Pay Structure

- 5.19 As indicated in the report on the Medium Term Financial Plan in June 2022, an emerging issue arising from the increase in the NLW is the erosion of the 'headroom' between it and the lowest points on the NJC Pay Scales, a principle of that Employers have sought to maintain since the introduction of the NMW.
- 5.20 According to present forecasts, by 2024 all of the 'headroom' will have gone and, given the view of Local Government Employers that Local Government should not be a minimum wage employer, consideration is being given to options to avoid this. Indeed, the current flat rate payment proposed by the Employers in their pay offer for 2022/23 recognises the difficulty this issue is causing.
- 5.21 Any options (eg deleting pay points or reducing the working week) have the potential to result in additional costs for Councils (and may, if there is a need to undertake a formal job evaluation exercise, lead to significant additional work) so this matter will need to remain under close review.

Pension Fund Valuation

- 5.22 The Executive Board may be aware that, as with all Local Government Pension Funds, the Lancashire Pension Fund is subject to a valuation every three years. The outcome of these triennial valuations is to determine Employers Contribution Rates for the following three years.
- 5.23 Work on the triennial valuation of the Fund has been ongoing in recent months, on the basis of the position of Fund as at 31st March 2022. The initial results from this work, for the Fund overall, is that it has performed well over the last three years. That said, the Council has yet to receive details of its own position within the Fund; these are due in October with the likelihood that a report on this matter will be considered by the Executive Board before the end of the year.

Social Care Reforms (including Market Sustainability and Cost of Care exercise)

- 5.24 At its meeting in August 2022, the Executive Board received a report providing details of a range of Adult Social Care Reforms. These include, for example, the introduction of the Care Cap, a change to the existing means test for chargeable care services, the requirement to make an assessment of, and move to pay, a fair cost of care (and to produce a Market Sustainability Plan) and the assessment and brokerage of care for Self Funders.
- 5.25 As required by Government, and as outlined in the report referred to above, a substantial amount of work has been undertaken over the Summer on the Fair Cost of Care exercise for Domiciliary Care and Residential/Nursing Care. This work is expected to inform the Provider Fee uplifts in 2023/24 (as well as potential additional fee payments in 2022/23). More details of this will be subject of a report to the Executive in due course.
- 5.26 In the meantime, work continues on the assessment of likely costs of the broader reforms. At the same time, the Government has been consulting on the distribution of the additional funding identified for the reforms. In the absence of both firm estimates of costs and confirmation of funding allocations from Government, it is not possible at this stage to be definitive about the impact on the Council suffice to say that there is a general view amongst local authorities that the proportion of funding allocated for these reforms is likely to be insufficient to meet the estimated costs. **Councillors should note that, at this stage, aside from the estimated uplift of Provider Fees, no additional funding is factored into the MTFP for these reforms at this stage.**
- 5.27 Again, in view of the magnitude of the proposed changes and once more information is available from the Government, a report on this matter will be submitted for consideration by the Executive Board in due course.

Care Quality Commission (CQC) Inspection

- 5.28 Councillors will be aware that the Health and Care Act 2022 includes provisions for a new assurance framework led by the CQC to inspect the performance of the delivery of Adult Social Care. The implementation of these provisions depends on the enactment of the Bill, the arrangements that the CQC need to put in place to conduct the inspection and the timetabling of individual Local Authority inspections.

- 5.29 The CQC Inspection is likely to focus on the Council's arrangements for working with people- (assessment of needs, prevention etc.), providing support (nature and strength of care markets, integration with NHS etc.), ensuring the safety of residents (safeguarding, safe systems of care) and Leadership.
- 5.30 Despite the uncertainty around the date of inspection of the Council's Adult Social Services, work is already underway to ensure the Council is prepared for any such inspection. This will include, in due course, briefing for Councillors as necessary. Subject to this ongoing work, there may be a need to consider the Council's capacity to do this work effectively so that the Council is adequately prepared.

Academisation of Schools

- 5.31 Following the publication of the Education White Paper, the Government has set out a clear timeline for all Schools to become part of a Multi-Academy Trust by 2030. This includes the proposal for Local Authorities to establish MATs.
- 5.32 Whether the Council establishes a MAT will be a matter for further consideration in due course. Aside from the national policy intent, any assessment of this will need to include the financial impact on the Council (and Schools for that matters) with a view to understanding better the implications in the context of the Council's MTFP.

Other Matters

- 5.33 The narrative above sets out some of the key matters for Executive Board consider but it is not an exhaustive list. Other issues include, for example, the sustainability of recharges to the capital account, management of adult and children's social care demand, affordability of rising debt charges, the future of shared costs under the Continuing Healthcare arrangements given the changes to the Health and Social Care system in Lancashire. As ever, consideration will be given to the likely impact of these matters on the Council's MTFP.

Scenario Planning (Sensitivity Analysis)

- 5.34 As mentioned above, the MTFP is based on a range of assumptions which impact on both income and expenditure. Changes in these assumptions can have a fundamental effect on the Council's funding gap and the level of savings the Council will be required to make over the next 3 years.
- 5.35 The Executive Board will appreciate that it is good practice to model scenarios based on changes to some of the key assumptions in the MTFP. The purpose of this sensitivity analysis is not to predict or forecast the future, but rather test and understand the Council's sustainability into an uncertain future given alternative plausible scenarios for the key drivers of costs, service demands, funding and key risks to which the Council is exposed. Such 'stress testing' is considered to be good practice and acts as an indicator of the Council's financial sustainability.
- 5.36 The sensitivity analysis gives some indication of the likely range of the Council's deficit position bounded by realistic worst- and best-case scenarios. Although it is always possible there might be scenarios outside of these boundaries (as well as numerous ones within them), this is considered unlikely as the worst case assumes strongly negative estimates for most of the main aspects of the MTFP. Likewise, the best-case contains only positive changes.

- 5.37 Some of the key variables that have been modelled are as set out at **Appendix C** with the results of this analysis at **Appendix D** and summarised in Table 2 below:-

Table 2: Scenario Analysis

	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000
Best Case	3,723	7,500	11,679
Base Position (Table 1 above)	8,656	12,866	18,590
Worst Case	14,373	19,954	26,520

See Appendix C and D

- 5.38 As the table indicates, the range of potential positions is a deficit of c£3.7m to a deficit of £27m. These scenarios are provided to reflect the level of potential volatility in the assumptions and reinforces the uncertainty with future budget estimates.

Financial Strategy 2022/23 to 2025/26

- 5.39 By way of a reminder, the Financial Strategy remains based around four key strands – Growing, Charging, Saving and Stopping. An outline explanation of these strand is provided below along with an update on progress wit :-

- **Growing** the Council's income using the funding mechanisms now in place for local government, particularly the Business Rate Retention Scheme and the New Homes Bonus if it remains as a potential income stream. This means that the Council must actively consider ways in which it can increase income from business and housing growth to ensure that funding for services can be maintained.

By way of an update on this strand, as the Executive Board is aware, the Council has an ambitious Growth Strategy for the Borough. Building on the significant growth in housing delivery over recent years, following the last meeting of Full Council, the Council has submitted its draft Local Plan for examination by the Planning Inspectorate. Subject to the Local Plan being adopted by the Council following examination, this will provide the spatial and planning policy framework for the Council to build on the housing and economic growth achieved to date.

At the same time, work is ongoing on the delivery of the Darwen Town Deal where almost all of the business cases for the various projects have been approved by DHLUC. This will allow delivery of the projects to be begin. The grant funding provided through the Town Deal is being matched both by the Council's own funds and significant private sector investment.

And earlier this year, the Council submitted two bids to the Government for Levelling Up Funding of £40m. One of the bids will accelerate the first phase of the £250m masterplan for Blackburn Town Centre, including a new £60m Skills and Education Campus, with the other to be invested to significantly improve the transport infrastructure to the south of Blackburn, including upgrades to Junction 5 of the M65 motorway.

- **Charging** for services, raising income which will mean that it is possible to continue providing services that resident's value. This will mean reviewing the level of fees and charges, reducing the subsidy on some services and considering the introduction of new fees and charges. It will also include reviewing the amount of Council Tax Support given;

At the last meeting of the Executive Board, a range of income generation proposals was considered and approved. The additional income from these changes will both impact on the budget in 2022/23 and future years.

The Executive Board also approved the Fees and Charges Framework as the basis of reviewing the Council's discretionary fees and charges. Recognising the significant amount of income generated from fees and charges, this is with a view to ensuring that there are regular reviews of fees and charges, that the basis on which they are set reflects the service objectives and that wherever possible, income is maximised.

- **Saving** costs by, for example, reviewing how the Council delivers services, doing things differently and more efficiently, scaling services to appropriate levels within the resources available to the Council and working with local town and parish councils and other partners to sustain local facilities;
- **Stop** spending on lower or non-priority areas. This could also mean, for example, that the Council works with other partners (Voluntary, Faith, Community Sector, Town/Parish Councils etc.) and residents to deliver services, something akin to the 'Your Call' Initiative.

*Work on both of these strands is captured in a series of Workstreams, details of which are provided at **Appendix E**. These Workstreams comprise cross-cutting matters such as an Organisational Review, Asset Management reviews (including Council Office Accommodation), Procurement and consideration of Alternative Models of Service Delivery as well as specific services reviews including Adult Social Services and Children's and Young People Services. Underpinning these reviews are enabling functions such as transformation and human resources which will support any proposals arising.*

5.40 A further update on the implementation of the Financial Strategy will be provided as the budget process develops.

Next Steps

5.41 Table 3 below provides an outline timetable for the development of the budget for 2023/24.

Table 3: Indicative Timetable for Development of Budget 2023/24

Date	Action	Status
Mar 2022	Budget Implementation Report 2022/23	Completed
June 2022	Updated MTFP to the Executive Board	Completed
June - Sept 2022	Development of Proposals	In Progress
13th Oct 2022	Update MTFP to Executive Board	This report
Oct-Nov 2022	Further development of ideas/options	
8th Dec 2022	First Budget Report to Executive Board (Indicative)	
Dec 2022	Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement (LGFS) 2023/24	
Dec 2022	Update on Budget/LGFS to Corporate Leadership Team	
Dec 2022	Update on Budget/LGFS to Policy Development Session	
19th Dec 2022	First Budget Report to Resources Scrutiny	
Jan/Feb 2023	Final Local Government Finance Settlement 2023/24	
Jan 2023	Update on Budget to Corporate Leadership Team	
9th Feb 2023	Second Budget Report to Executive Board (with Scrutiny Minutes)	
27th Feb 2023	Finance Council sets Budget and Council Tax for 2023/24	

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no policy implications arising directly from this report.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The financial implications are as given in the report.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from the contents of this report.

9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no other resources implications arising from the contents of this report.

10. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no equality and health implications arising from the contents of this report.

11. CONSULTATIONS

11.1 None arising from the contents of this report.

12. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

12.1 None arising from the contents of this report.

Appendices

Appendix A – Updated Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/26

Appendix B – Changes to the Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/26 since Finance Council

Appendix C – Assumptions for Best/Worst Case Scenario Analysis

Appendix D – Analysis of Best/West Case Scenario Analysis

Appendix E – Outline of Strategic Workstreams

VERSION:	1
CONTACT OFFICER:	Dean Langton – Director of Finance
DATE:	30 th September 2022
BACKGROUND PAPERS:	None

Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/25

Funding Statement

	2022/23 Revised Budget £000	2023/24 Base Budget £000	2024/25 Base Budget £000	2025/26 Base Budget £000	2026/27 Base Budget £000
Estimated Funding					
Business Rates	(18,185)	(20,306)	(20,712)	(21,126)	(21,549)
Business Rates - Top Up	(24,275)	(24,761)	(25,256)	(25,761)	(26,276)
Revenue Support Grant	(14,016)	(14,016)	(14,016)	(14,016)	(14,016)
Improved Better Care Fund Grant	(8,349)	(8,349)	(8,349)	(8,349)	(8,349)
Social Care Grant	(8,813)	(8,813)	(8,813)	(8,813)	(8,813)
Market Sustainability and Fair Funding	(516)	-	-	-	-
BSF PFI Grant	(8,472)	(8,472)	(8,472)	(8,472)	(8,472)
Council Tax Income (incl Social Care Precept)	(60,171)	(62,294)	(64,492)	(66,767)	(69,123)
Council Tax Income - Town and Parish Precepts	(164)	(164)	(164)	(164)	(164)
Transfer from/to Collection Fund - Council Tax	(755)	(39)	(765)	(765)	(765)
Transfer from/to Collection Fund - NNDR	6,859	344	-	-	-
Total Estimated Funding	(136,857)	(146,870)	(151,039)	(154,233)	(157,527)
Forecast Expenditure					
Portfolios	133,880	133,905	133,560	133,560	133,560
Corporate Income and Expenditure					
Contingencies	5,505	15,953	23,889	31,730	39,066
RCCO	6,351	-	-	-	-
Debt Charges	18,987	19,325	19,582	19,736	19,736
Recharges to Schools	(1,274)	(1,207)	(1,154)	(1,091)	(1,016)
Benefit Admin Grants	(650)	(700)	(650)	(250)	(250)
New Homes Bonus	(1,006)	-	-	-	-
Lower Tier Services Grant	(341)	(341)	(341)	(341)	(341)
Services Grant	(3,072)	(3,072)	(3,072)	(3,072)	(3,072)
Business Rates s31 Grant	(8,568)	(7,140)	(7,140)	(7,140)	(7,140)
Council Tax Support Grant	-	-	-	-	-
Town and Parish Precepts (incl Grants)	191	191	191	191	191
Net Expenditure	150,003	156,914	164,865	173,323	180,734
Contributions to/(from) Reserves					
R&M Sinking Fund	80	80	80	-	-
Welfare Reform Reserves	-	-	-	-	-
Covid-19 Reserve	-	-	-	-	-
NNDR Reserve	(5,471)	-	-	-	-
Other Reserves (to fund RCCO)	(6,261)	-	-	-	-
Invest to Save Reserve	(374)	-	-	-	-
Use of Budget Strategy Reserve	(1,120)	(1,468)	(1,040)	(500)	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Budget Requirement (excl GF Balance)	136,857	155,526	163,905	172,823	180,734
Contribution to/from GF Balance	-	-	-	-	-
Budget Requirement	136,857	155,526	163,905	172,823	180,734
Net Shortfall/(Surplus)	-	8,656	12,866	18,590	23,207

Changes in the Medium Term Financial Plan since 28th February 2022

	2023/24 Base Budget £000	2024/25 Base Budget £000	2025/26 Base Budget £000	2026/27 Base Budget £000
Report to Finance Council 28th February 2022	2,885	5,980	9,025	-
Change in Business Rates Assumptions	(134)	(128)	(122)	
Change in Council Tax Assumptions	(3)	(11)	(30)	
Change in Inflation for National Living Wage (ASC)	2,942	2,942	2,942	
As above - moved to ASC	(242)	(242)	(242)	
As above - moved to ASC	(2,700)	(2,700)	(2,700)	
In Year Transfer to Reserves (for Leisure Equipment/Sinking Fund) not necessary in Year 3	-	-	(80)	
Add on Deficit for next Financial Year				12,943
Starting Point for Report to CLT 19th April 2022	2,748	5,841	8,793	12,943
Adjustment to HB/CTS Admin Subsidy	(100)	(100)	250	200
National Living Wage Adjustment	285	(96)	987	938
ASC Commissioning Inflation	421	449	455	509
Update to Pay Award Assumptions (4% in 2023/24, 2% pa thereafter)	1,084	998	936	936
Update to National Insurance Assumptions (in line with Pay Award increase)	239	364	491	617
Update to Pension Assumptions (in line with Pay Award increase)	34	66	97	129
Utility Inflation	334	490	657	824
Children's Commissioning Inflation	163	333	518	703
Report to CLT 19th April 2022 and Executive Board 9th June 2022	5,207	8,344	13,185	17,801
Additional Revenue Cost of WAN and Network Upgrade	27	27	27	27
Assumed Grant for Conducting Elections excluded	110	110	110	110
Old Bank Lane Car Park (Lease to NHS) Executive Board 11th Aug 2022	(210)	(210)	(210)	(210)
Impact of Pay Offer in 2022/23 - Pay	2,737	3,476	3,571	3,571
Impact of Pay Offer in 2022/23 - NI	251	327	338	338
Impact of Pay Offer in 2022/23 - Pension	725	775	824	824
Delete Contingency that will be used for Pay Award in 2022/23	(1,007)	(1,007)	(1,007)	(1,007)
Children's Services - Savings NOT implemented	266	266	266	266
No NI Increase (or Health and Social Care Levy)	(250)	(250)	(250)	(250)
Albion Mill - Potential Additional Costs	800	800	800	800
Provider Fee Uplift Adjustments Year 2	-	208	208	208
Provider Fee Uplift Adjustments Year 3			729	729
Report to CLT 5th October and Executive Board 13th October 2022	8,656	12,866	18,590	23,207

Scenario Analysis - Assumptions for Worst/Base/Best Case Position

Variable	Worst Case	Base Position	Best Case
Services Grant	£2.000m	£3.072m	£4.000m
New Homes Bonus	-	-	Scheme rolled forward 1 year £1.006m
Lower Tier Services Grant	-	-	-
Pay Award	6% in 2023/24 4% in 2024/25 3% in 2025/26	4% in 2023/24 3% in 2024/25 2% in 2025/26	2% in 2023/24 2% in 2024/25 2% in 2025/26
National Living Wage	10.5% in 2023/24 8.0% in 2024/25 8.0% in 2025/26	6.6% in 2023/24 6.6% in 2024/25 6.6% in 2025/26	6.6% in 2023/24 6.6% in 2024/25 6.6% in 2025/26
Energy Inflation	20% in 2023/24 10% in 2024/25 10% in 2025/26	10% in 2023/24 5% in 2024/25 5% in 2025/26	5% in 2023/24 2% in 2024/25 2% in 2025/26
Children Services	£2.000m	-	-

Scenario Analysis - Scenarios for Worst/Base/Best Case Position

	Worst Case				Better Case			
	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Base Position	8,656	12,658	17,653	22,270	8,656	12,658	17,653	22,270
Services Grant	3,072	3,072	3,072	3,072	3,072	3,072	3,072	3,072
Lower Tier Services Grant	341	341	341	341	341	341	341	341
New Homes Bonus	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pay Award	(5,120)	(7,098)	(8,456)	(9,781)	(5,120)	(7,098)	(8,456)	(9,781)
Pension Contribution	(1,313)	(1,948)	(2,583)	(3,169)	(1,313)	(1,948)	(2,583)	(3,169)
National Living Wage	(4,553)	(8,978)	(13,966)	(18,542)	(4,553)	(8,978)	(13,966)	(18,542)
Energy Inflation	(392)	(607)	(833)	(1,059)	(392)	(607)	(833)	(1,059)
Children Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	692	(2,560)	(4,772)	(6,868)	692	(2,560)	(4,772)	(6,868)
Services Grant	(2,000)	(2,000)	(2,000)	(2,000)	(4,000)	(4,000)	(4,000)	(4,000)
Lower Tier Services Grant	-	-	-	-	(341)	(341)	(341)	(341)
New Homes Bonus	-	-	-	-	(1,006)	-	-	-
Pay Award	6,388	9,076	11,173	13,269	3,852	5,145	6,464	7,784
National Living Wage	6,510	12,185	18,349	24,513	4,331	8,978	13,966	18,542
Energy Inflation	783	1,253	1,770	2,487	196	278	362	446
Children Services	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	-	-	-	-
Revised Deficit	14,373	19,954	26,520	33,402	3,723	7,500	11,679	15,562
Best								15,562
Base								22,270
Worst								33,402

Strategic Workstreams

1.1 Acknowledging the need for a strategic approach to the development of budget options, the following 8 strategic workstreams provide the basis for :-

- **Workstream 1 - Organisational Review** – in line with the emerging new Corporate Plan, which is due to be published in draft later this year, there is a need to consider the robustness of the Council's existing target operating model (and with it the organisational structure, governance and processes) to determine how best to deliver key policies. This will initially be informed by a diagnostic exercise to review current ways of working, identifies how staff spend their time and where opportunities for efficiencies may be available and what structures are most appropriate to achieve the Council's objectives;
- **Workstream 2 - Asset Review** – recognising that the impact of Covid-19 has meant the Council has adopted a form of hybrid working, supported by a significant investment in technology that supports different ways of working, combined with a need to review the Council's asset base in the context of priorities for service delivery, it is proposed to undertake an Asset Review.

Phase 1 of the Asset Review will focus on the following assets (and follows on from the completion of Phase 1 of the Accommodation Strategy):-

- **The 'Tower'** – following the completion of Phase 1 of the Accommodation Strategy, this property is largely vacant; the next step requires the building to be completely vacated thereby reducing the operating costs as much as possible (to include taking the building out of the rating system). In parallel with this, work to repurpose the building needs to be accelerated;
- **Duke Street** – the proposal here is to consider how best to use the building in the context of the Council's accommodation needs;
- **Davyfield Depot** – given potential interest in part of the Daisyfield Depot site for redevelopment combined with the impact of hybrid working, there is an opportunity to consider the reconfiguration of the Depot which could result in a capital receipt for the Council, the provision of land for business expansion and reduce the operating costs of the Depot;
- **One Cathedral Quarter** – again, acknowledging the attractiveness of this building to the commercial sector, the proposal here is to consider how best to use the building as part of the broader approach to accommodation needs.

Phase 2 of the Asset Review is subject to the completion of the updated Asset Management Plan which, as well as Accommodation, will consider the sufficiency of the Council's broader operational assets. This may highlight opportunities for further rationalisation of Council assets. It is expected that the first draft of the updated Plan will be produced in December 2022.

- **Workstream 3 - Alternative Models of Service Delivery** – the Council has a good track record of considering alternative models for service delivery in a range of functions. The proposal here is to consider whether alternative models of service delivery for frontline services such as Waste Collection, Grounds Maintenance, Highways Maintenance, Building Cleaning and Building Maintenance might be possible whilst at the same time being provided at lower cost. Likewise, there are different operating models for Leisure, Culture and Arts Services and the proposal here would be to evaluate the options for future delivery with a focus on cost reductions/income generation;
- **Workstream 4 - Review of the Childrens Services Operating Model** – subject to the Organisational Review work identified above and acknowledging both the recent outcome of the Ofsted Inspection of Childrens Services and the extent to which additional investment has been made in the service, it is proposed to review the current operating model to ensure that the service is ‘fit for the future’ whilst at the same time considering what scope for budget efficiencies and reductions is possible;
- **Workstream 5 - Review of Adult Social Care Operating Model** – again, subject to the Organisational Review work identified above and with the recent appointment of a new Executive Director for Adult Services and Prevention, there is an opportunity to undertake a root and branch review of the Adult Social Care Operating Model. Indeed, with the significant reforms of Adult Social Care to be implemented over the next 18 months, how the Service is delivered requires reviewing so that it is positioned to deal with the changes;
- **Workstream 7 - Review of Back-Office Efficiency** – the Council has already conducted efficiency reviews of back-office functions. However, opportunities may arise following the Organisational Review (Workstream 1 above) to undertake further efficiency reviews of the Council’s back-office functions. Areas of consideration may include, for example the Council’s procurement/commissioning functions, Finance (including Revenue and Benefits), Business Support, property and asset management. Consideration of this matter needs to be cognisant of the work on the Accommodation Strategy which may present opportunities to co-locate services to achieve better collaboration and co-ordination of service delivery as a consequence;
- **Workstream 8 – Procurement (reduction in Contract and Third Party Spend)** – beyond the strategic review of alternative delivery models (Workstream 3 above), driving value from the Council’s procurement of goods and services must be key part of the Council’s approach to managing the budget deficit. As a benchmark, with any new tender for goods/services funded from the Council’s Revenue Account, **a reduction of 10% in the contract value should be sought**, whether that is from better pricing, value engineering or changes in contract specification. By way of illustration, in the context of an anticipated procurement pipeline of c£12m in 2022/23, such an approach could deliver savings in excess of £1m.

1.2 Underpinning these strategic reviews will need to be a reinvigorated transformative approach to service delivery that will seek to use **data and insight** to better inform decision making and **service re-design (or transformation)** that will exploit new technologies such as automation and (eventually) artificial intelligence. Both of these matters, along with a more disciplined approach to ‘Digital First’ for the delivery of services, are central to the Council’s agreed Digital Strategy and need to be integral to the strategic reviews above.

- 1.3 Similarly, a number of these workstreams are likely to require a review and refresh of the Council's ***Human Resources Strategy*** and related policies and procedures, not least around the approach to hybrid working, co-location of staff and related terms and conditions. That said, fundamentally, to achieve the savings above, there will need to be a reduction in staff numbers and this will need to be managed effectively. It should be noted that this work is in addition to the current programme of activity around Organisational Development.

EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Finance and Governance, Executive Member for Growth and Development
LEAD OFFICERS:	Chief Executive
DATE:	Thursday, 13 October 2022

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Growth and Development
WARD/S AFFECTED:	Little Harwood and Whitebirk;
KEY DECISION:	Y

SUBJECT: Disposal of Land at Plot 3, Carl Fogarty Way, Blackburn

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report outlines the outcome of the informal tender exercise for land at Plot 3, Carl Fogarty Way, Blackburn ("the site") as illustrated on the plan attached at Annex A.
- 1.2 This report seeks approval to dispose of the Site for commercial development to the recommended Preferred Bidder.
- 1.3 This report seeks approval to enter into a Conditional Contract and subsequent Building Licence with the Preferred Bidder.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

- 2.1 Approves the sale of the Site to Bidder 4, as Preferred Bidder, for the agreed Purchase Price and part deferred payment profile.
- 2.2 Authorises the Growth Programme Director to finalise the heads of terms for the Conditional Contract and the terms and conditions of the Building Licence.
- 2.3 Authorises the Deputy Director, Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer) to complete the necessary legal formalities in the disposal process.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Plot 3 Carl Fogarty Way is situated in a prominent 'gateway' location along the main route into Blackburn Town centre from Junction 6 of the M65 and comprises 2.35 acres or thereabouts. The site is served by a newly constructed, and adopted, vehicular access with excellent roadside frontage and presents an exciting opportunity to develop an attractive high quality commercial scheme with business or trade showroom potential at this key gateway location.

- 3.2 The site was offered for sale by informal tender on 14th March 2022 with a closing date of 9th May 2022.
- 3.3 Tender documents were issued to over 40 local and regional developers/businesses who had previously expressed an interest in this or similar sites within the Borough. Bidders were made aware that preference would be given by the Council to bids from owner occupiers looking to relocate to the Borough or existing Blackburn with Darwen businesses looking to expand in the Borough.
- 3.4 Due to the proximity of adjacent residential properties bidders were advised to carefully consider the proposed end use as the site will have noise and operating restrictions imposed by the Local Planning Authority.
- 3.5 Bidders were also advised that the Council is under no obligation to accept the highest or indeed any offer. The purchase price would be balanced against other benefits from the proposed scheme such as quality of design, layout, end use, development timeframe and the ability to fund the land purchase and development costs
- 3.6 Tender Assessment
Seven compliant bids were received by post by the closing date of 9th May 2022 and these are summarised below:

Bidder ID	Use	Owner / Investment	Relocation or Expansion
1	Car showroom, sales and vehicle storage	Owner	Expansion of an existing Blackburn business
2	HQ offices, van leasing, sales and support services	Owner	Expansion of an existing Blackburn business
3	E / B2 / B8 Commercial Use	Investment	Speculative scheme
4	Car showroom, sales and head office functions	Owner	Expansion of an existing Blackburn business
5	B2 / B8 Commercial Use	Investment	Speculative scheme
6	B2 / B8 Commercial Use	Owner	Relocation (currently renting) and expansion
7	Warehousing / Transport / Distribution	Owner	Expansion of an existing Blackburn business

- 3.7 The bids were carefully evaluated by selected members of the Growth Team having regard to the tender price and the other essential criteria referred to under paragraph 3.5 above. The assessment identified a number of areas which required further clarification and in consultation with the Executive Member for Growth and Development the Growth Director invited the top four bidders (by bid offer) to respond to a set of clarification questions by email.
- 3.8 Bidders 1 – 4 in the above Table were invited to proceed to the second stage tender process.
- 3.9 Following the first stage assessment all bidders were informed on 7th July 2022 as to whether they had been successful or unsuccessful with their bid.
- 3.10 Second Stage Tender Process
The bidders were invited to respond to a number of clarification questions to assist the Council officers in undertaking a more detailed assessment of the revised bids. The clarification questions are summarised

below :

A. Scheme layout, massing and detail

Bidders were required to demonstrate how their design and layout optimised the site potential given the unique road side frontage.

B. Quality of design, streetscape, and proposed materials

The Council wishes to see a building at scale and purpose given the gateway route into Blackburn and this requirement would demonstrate the quality of the design proposals.

C. Details of end user operations and business need

Bidders were required to demonstrate how the site location supports the growth of the business. The Council wishes to support a growing local business (or a new business to the Borough) that requires this unique road side frontage and bidders were required to provide compelling reasons.

D. Job Creation, retention and quality

This question required bidders to demonstrate the quality and number of jobs the business will support. The Council wishes to support a growing business which will create the quality and number of job opportunities.

E. Financial and commercial offer.

Bidders were required to provide further details in terms of the delivery team, development programme, an estimate of the development costs prepared by their professional team and evidence of their ability to fund the scheme and a supporting statement from their bank or accountant relating to their financial standing.

3.11 Bidders were also given the opportunity to revise their financial offer taking into consideration the supporting information previously provided by the Council and their responses to the clarification questions outlined above.

3.12 Stage 2 Tender Returns

The Stage 2 returns were received from each of the four bidders by the closing date of 11th July 2022.

3.13 A detailed assessment was undertaken for each bid which is summarised in the table below:

Bidder ID	Use	Relocation or Expansion	Financial Assessment
1	Car showroom, sales and vehicle storage	Expansion of an existing Blackburn business	Offer remains the same but still represents an excellent offer for the site and remains the highest bid.
2	HQ offices, van leasing, sales and support services	Expansion of an existing Blackburn business	Offer increased and represents a very good offer for the site.
3	Change in scheme from E / B2 / B8 commercial use to a retail use for a new food operator.	New food store proposal	Despite the change in use the offer remains the same and does not reflect the potential uplift in value that a retail consent would generate
4	Car showroom, sales and offices	Expansion – organic growth	The offer has increased significantly and represents an excellent offer for the site

3.14 Each bidder had submitted comprehensive responses to the clarification questions (see 3.10 above) and

each response together with the Council's planning comments was assessed with a score ranging from 0 – 4 which is summarised in the tables below:

Assessment of Clarification Questions	Bidder 4	Bidder 3	Bidder 2	Bidder 1
A. Scheme layout, massing and scale.	4	2	2	2
B. Quality of design, streetscape and proposed materials	3	3	2	2
C. Details of end user operations and business need.	3	3	3	3
D. Job creation, retention and quality	3	3	3	3
E. Financial and commercial offer	4	3	3	4

Overall Quality Assessment	17/20	14/20	14/20	14/20
Planning Risk	Low	High	Medium	Medium

3.15 Following the above assessment Bidder 4 is assessed as providing the best overall scheme with the highest quality and economic outputs together with the lowest planning risk and is therefore recommended as the Preferred Bidder.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

- 4.1 Bidder 4 has submitted a compliant tender bid with an acceptable indicative scheme, subject to detailed planning and it is recommended that the Council proceeds in the sale of the land to Bidder 4.
- 4.2 The transfer of the freehold interest in the land will be preceded by a Building Licence. Bidder 4 will be required to enter into a Conditional Contract with the Council which will be conditional predominately on obtaining planning consent, developing the site in accordance with the approved Planning Permission and in line with the development timeframe. Because part of Bidder 4's successful tender was based on planning risk and proposal, the Conditional Contract will reinforce the requirement of this planning outcome.
- 4.3 The Conditional Contract will act as an overarching agreement incorporating the final head of terms and enabling the granting of the Building Licence. The purchaser will be required to pay a deposit based on 20% of the purchase price + VAT.
- 4.4 Following satisfactory completion of the development and on payment of the balance of the purchase Price + VAT (less any permitted deductions) the freehold interest will be transferred to Bidder 4.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The disposal method accords with the Council's approved policy for disposals and is in accordance with the Council Local Plan.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The site has been elected for VAT.
- 6.2 The Council will receive a gross capital receipt + VAT.
- 6.3 The purchaser will make a contribution towards the Council's surveyors fees and legal costs.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The disposal method complies with the Council's legal obligations for such transactions and with the Council's Disposal Policy 2019.
- 7.2 As the proposed disposal is for the freehold of the land, then various aspects of S123 of the Local Government Act 1972 are considered to apply.
- 7.3 The Preferred Bidder has been assessed as providing, on balance, the highest overall economic, social and environmental benefits for the Council as set out the Local Government Act 1972 General Disposal Consent (England) 2003 Circular 06/2003 with the undervalue being below the disposal limit.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The disposal will be managed by existing resources within the Growth & Development team.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 ☒ Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 ☐ In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA link here*)

Option 3 ☐ In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA attachment*)

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 Statutory stakeholder and public consultations will be undertaken during the planning application process.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

VERSION:	1
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CONTACT OFFICER:	Simon Jones – Growth Programme Director
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DATE:	October 2022
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BACKGROUND PAPER:	Growth Programme 2022/23
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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted