

# Public Document Pack

## Executive Board

Thursday, 11 January 2024

Time: 6.00 pm

Venue: Meeting Room A

Address: Blackburn Town Hall

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### 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 December 2023** **4 - 15**
3. **Declarations of Interest**  
**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FORM** **16**
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**

**Adult Social Care & Health**

## **Children, Young People & Education**

### **8.1 Schools Capital Programme**

<b>Schools Capital Programme</b>	<b>17 - 24</b>
<b>Appendix 1 Education Capital Programme 23 24 Report</b>	
<b>Appendix 2 Education Capital Programme 23 24 Report</b>	

## **Environment & Operations**

## **Public Health, Prevention & Wellbeing**

### **8.2 Sexual Health Strategy 2023-28**

<b>Sexual Health Strategy</b>	<b>25 - 75</b>
<b>Appendix 1 Sexual health strategy 2023-28</b>	
<b>Appendix 2 Blackburn with Darwen Sexual Health Strategy Challenges</b>	

## **Digital & Customer Services**

## **Growth & Development**

### **8.3 Purchase of Land and Buildings at Holden Fold for 'Specialist Affordable Housing Provision'**

<b>Purchase of land and buildings at Holden Fold Darwen Pt1</b>	<b>76 - 82</b>
<b>Appendix A Beehive Mill Darwen</b>	

## **Finance & Governance**

### **8.4 Development of the General Fund Revenue Budget (including details of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2024/25)**

<b>General Fund Revenue Budget</b>	<b>83 - 99</b>
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### **9. Corporate Issues**

### **10. Matters referred to the Executive Board**

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

### **11.1 Purchase of Land and Buildings at Holden Fold for 'Specialist Affordable Housing Provision'**

<b>Purchase of land and buildings at Holden Fold DarwenPt2</b>	<b>100 - 105</b>
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Date Published: Wednesday, 03 January 2024  
Denise Park, Chief Executive

## EXECUTIVE BOARD Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023

### PRESENT

#### **COUNCILLOR:**

Councillor Phil Riley  
Councillor Julie Gunn  
Councillor Mahfooz Hussain  
Councillor Damian Talbot  
Councillor Quesir Mahmood  
Councillor Jackie Floyd  
Councillor Jim Smith

#### **PORTFOLIO:**

Leader of the Council  
Children, Young People & Education  
Digital & Customer Services  
Public Health, Prevention & Wellbeing  
Growth & Development  
Adult Social Care  
Environment & Operations

#### **EXECUTIVE MEMBER**

Councillor John Slater

#### **NON PORTFOLIO**

Leader of the Conservative Group

#### **YOUTH FORUM**

#### **REPRESENTATIVES:**

Mo Kharbari  
Faisel Ahmed

	Item	Action
1	<p><b><u>Welcome and Apologies</u></b></p> <p>The Leader of the Council, Councillor Phil Riley, welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies were received from Councillor Vicky McGurk.</p>	
2	<p><b><u>Minutes of the Previous Meeting</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2023 were agreed as a correct record.</p>	<b>Agreed</b>
3	<p><b><u>Declarations of Interest</u></b></p> <p>No Declarations of Interest were received.</p>	
4	<p><b><u>Equality Implications</u></b></p> <p>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.</p>	<b>Confirmed</b>
5	<p><b><u>Public Forum</u></b></p> <p>No questions from members of the public had been received.</p>	
6	<p><b><u>Questions by Non-Executive Members</u></b></p> <p>No questions from Non-Executive Members had been received.</p>	

	Item	Action
7	<p><b><u>Youth MPs Update</u></b></p> <p>The Youth Forum representatives verbally reported on recent events and activities including :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A residential trip to London, where Youth Forum reps visited the House of Commons and debated 5 topics, with top vote going to ‘Finance and Funding’ and Youth MPs across the country would be focussing on this topic going forwards. The trip also included a visit to the Supreme Court.</li> <li>• Discussions with Cllr Damian Talbot and Martin Eden on the potential reduction in pricing for student memberships to access BwD Leisure Centre,</li> <li>• Participation in consultation on the draft Mental Wellbeing, Mental Health, Self-Harm and Suicide Prevention Strategy.</li> <li>• The latest Youthforia meeting.</li> </ul> <p>Councillors praised the work and involvement reported.</p>	Noted
	<p><b><u>Leader’s Update</u></b></p> <p>Councillor Phil Riley verbally updated the Executive Board on the latest position relating to Devolution in Lancashire, with consultation continuing until the end of January and he encouraged people to respond to the consultation.</p>	Noted
	<p><b><u>Children, Young People &amp; Education</u></b></p> <p>Councillor Julie Gunn verbally reported on a visit by Professor Bola Owolabi, Director of Health Inequalities, NHS England on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, who visited Family Hubs and gave very good feedback, and they were also impressed with the excellent take-up of targeted vaccinations, with 40.1% of primary age children having been administered the flu vaccine, and also with twice a day teeth brushing of children in nurseries.</p>	Noted
8.1	<p><b><u>Quarter 2 Fostering Report</u></b></p> <p>A report was submitted providing information on the management and performance of the Local Authority’s fostering service which is revised on a quarterly basis. This report, alongside Appendix 1, provided analysis of the period 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023 until the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023 and reflected upon data and service development over this period and recommendations for the next three monthly period.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b> – That the Executive Board notes the Fostering three monthly report for Quarter 2 alongside Appendix 1 which provides a service progress overview and summary of service</p>	Noted

	Item	Action
	development recommendations.	
8.2	<p><b><u>Early Years and Childcare Sufficiency Assessment</u></b></p> <p>Members received a report which advised the Council's Executive Board of the outcomes of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2023 in respect of the Local Authority's statutory duty under the Childcare Acts 2006 and 2016. A Childcare Sufficiency Assessment was a detailed investigation and measurement of the nature and extent of the need for, and supply of, childcare within each local area.</p> <p>At the point of undertaking the assessment the Government's plans for Expanded Early Years Entitlements and the Pathfinder for Wraparound Childcare had not been announced. Officers were currently working to understand the impact of the new entitlements for families and providers (including schools) in respect of supply and demand.</p> <p>The report highlighted data and information in terms of Supply, Demand, Free Funded Early Education, Quality Places and Childcare Costs.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED –</b></p> <p>That the Executive Board notes the content of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2023.</p>	Noted
8.3	<p><b><u>NHS Health Checks Tender 2024-2027 Award</u></b></p> <p>A report was submitted which advised that the NHS Health Check (NHSHC) programme was one of the prescribed mandated public health services that the Council was responsible for commissioning. Since 2016 this service had been delivered by GP practices as part of the Blackburn with Darwen Clinical Commissioning Group's Quality Contract. Since the transition of the Clinical Commissioning Group into the Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board (LSCICB) on 1st July 2022, the service had continued to be delivered by GP Practices supported by the local GP Federation also known as Local Primary Care by waiver in order to ensure uninterrupted delivery of the NHSHC programme.</p> <p>In June 2023, it was agreed by the Executive Board to carry out an open tender process with a view to awarding a new contract for the delivery of the NHSHC Programme from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, until at least April 2027.</p> <p>Following a robust open tender process, approval was now being sought to award the contract for the NHSHC Programme from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.</p>	

	Item	Action
	<p><b>RESOLVED-</b></p> <p>That the Executive Board approves the award of the contract for the NHS Health Check Programme for a three year period with the option to extend for a further two years to commence from the 1st April 2024.</p>	<p><b>Approved</b></p>
<p><b>8.4</b></p>	<p><b><u>IPC Collaborative Agreement</u></b></p> <p>Members were advised that the Council had held a service level agreement with Lancashire County Council's (LCC) Infection Control Prevention (IPC) Service since 2016 to deliver a shared IPC service across Lancashire and Blackburn with Darwen. It was agreed in 2016, that the Council would enter into a collaborative agreement with LCC, as the IPC service model developed by LCC had two key advantages of size, which could not be achieved cost-effectively on the Blackburn with Darwen footprint alone: 1) resilience and 2) appropriate mix of skills between strategic and operational functions.</p> <p>It was proposed that this arrangement continued for a further two years with the possibility of extending it for a further 1 + 1 years.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED -</b></p> <p>That the Executive Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notes the contents of this report;</li> <li>• Agrees for the Council to negotiate and enter into a collaborative agreement with Lancashire County Council to provide a shared, clinically-led Infection Prevention and Control service, for a term of 2 years, with the option to extend for a further 1 + 1 years;</li> <li>• Delegates the signing of the collaborative agreement to the Director of Public Health in consultation with the Deputy Director, Legal and Governance.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Noted Approved</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p>
<p><b>8.5</b></p>	<p><b><u>Refurbishment of football pitches and ancillary facilities at Green Lane, Blackburn</u></b></p> <p>A report was submitted, which advised that Mill Hill Juniors Football Club in partnership with Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council had submitted a grant application to the Football Foundation to refurbish the grassed football pitches and ancillary facilities at Green Lane, Blackburn. The project would improve the drainage of the pitches and the purchase of grass pitch maintenance machinery along with fencing and containers for storage. As part of the project, an existing defunct changing room building currently used as a maintenance store would also be refurbished to provide a building with a kitchen/servery, office space and toilets.</p>	

	Item	Action
	<p>Mill Hill Juniors FC had a 25 year lease on the green lane football pitches with 20 years left to run and Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council owned the freehold of the site and would procure the works.</p> <p>The grass pitches at the Green Lane site served numerous teams within the Club but they suffered from acute drainage problems. Extensive maintenance and drainage work was required to the grass pitches, the pitch maintenance machinery and the storage were all needed if the Club was to continue developing the number of junior players and provide a pathway to adult football. Upgrading the grass pitches at Green Lane would help consolidate the number of football teams and allow for steady sustainable growth of an additional team each year over the next five years.</p> <p>The Football Foundation had approved a capital grant offer of £249,121 which represented 78.4% of a total project cost of £317,900. The funding gap between the grant and the total project costs would be paid for using funds provided by Mill Hill Juniors Football Club.</p>	
	<p><b>RESOLVED -</b></p>	
	<p>That the Executive Board:</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the award of the Football Foundation capital grant offer of £249,121, towards the refurbishment of the grassed football pitches and ancillary facilities at Green Lane Blackburn.</li> <li>• Note that the total cost of the project is £317,900 and that the gap in funding between the capital grant and the total project cost will be met by funds provided by Mill Hill Juniors Football Club.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Noted</b></p> <p><b>Noted</b></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree that the Council will act as Accountable Body for the funding as set out in the report.</li> <li>• Give delegated authority to the Deputy Director, Legal and Governance to prepare and enter into an agreement with Mill Hill Juniors FC to ensure compliance with the relevant conditions of the grant that apply to the operation of the pitches and facilities.</li> <li>• Delegate authority to the Strategic Director of Environment and Operations in consultation with the Executive Member for Public Health, Prevention and Wellbeing to procure the works necessary to refurbish the grassed football pitches and ancillary facilities at Green Lane, Blackburn.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Approved</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p>
<p><b>8.6</b></p>	<p><b><u>Disposal of Land at Mellor Brook</u></b></p> <p>A report was submitted outlining the outcome of the informal</p>	



	Item	Action
	<p>tender exercise for the sale of Council owned land at Branch Road and Myerscough Smithy Road, Mellor Brook as illustrated on the plan attached at Appendix 1.</p> <p>The land was located in the district of South Ribble Borough Council ('South Ribble'), and owned by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and had been previously let under an agricultural lease. The Mellor Brook site is of 5.62 Ha (13.89 Acres) and is allocated for "Village Development" in the South Ribble Local Plan.</p> <p>The Council submitted a pre-planning application to South Ribble as part of the feasibility process and received positive feedback on the Council's development plans. An Informal tender exercise was undertaken over the summer of 2023 with fourteen 14 bids received from developers interested in purchasing the site.</p> <p>Three bidders were invited to submit final bids for the Mellor Brook site and these had now been assessed with a Preferred Bidder identified for the site.</p> <p>The report also outlined the process for the appropriation of the land from the Finance and Governance and Growth &amp; Development portfolios for planning purposes.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED -</b></p> <p>That the Executive Board:</p> <p>1.1. Approves the appointment of <b>Prospect Homes</b> as Preferred Bidder for the Mellor Brook site;</p> <p>1.2. Approves the appointment of Bidder 2 and Bidder 3 as Reserve Bidders for the Mellor Brook site;</p> <p>1.3. Authorises the Growth Programme Director to finalise and complete the terms of the disposal, including the appointment of the Reserve Bidder should the Preferred Bidder withdraw from the process or is unable to finalise terms with the Council;</p> <p>1.4. Authorises the Deputy Director of Legal and Governance to complete the necessary legal formalities in the disposal process of the Council owned land;</p> <p>1.5. Authorise the Strategic Director of Growth &amp; Development to appropriate the land at Mellor Brook shown edged red on the attached plan, <b>Appendix 1</b> from the Finance and Governance and Growth &amp; Development portfolios for planning purposes pursuant to section 122 Local Government Act 1972;</p> <p>1.6. Notes the land is currently used for agricultural purposes and not used as open space. As such there is no need to advertise disposal of open space;</p>	<p></p> <p></p> <p></p> <p></p> <p></p> <p></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p> <p><b>Noted</b></p>

	Item	Action
	1.7. Notes that in authorising the commencement of the appropriation process of the Mellor Brook site, the Council has considered the provisions of the Equalities Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998 as set out in this report;	<b>Noted</b>
	1.8. Delegates authority to the Strategic Director of Growth & Development in consultation with the Executive Member for Growth & Development to consider any objections to the appropriation proposal and, if no objections are received then for the appropriation to be deemed approved;	<b>Approved</b>
	1.9. Notes the Council's powers under section 203 – 206 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 to override any third party rights and easements on the land once planning permission for the planning purpose has been obtained. Where necessary to enable the planning purpose to be achieved, authorise the Strategic Director of Growth & Development to override any said third party rights or easements; and	<b>Noted</b>
	1.10 If the appropriation for planning purposes is approved and any third party rights and easements have been overridden, authorise the Strategic Director of Growth & Development for the negotiation and payment of any compensation claims arising from overridden easements / other rights, under section 204 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016.	<b>Approved</b>
8.7	<p><b><u>Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan</u></b></p> <p>Approval of the Blackburn with Darwen Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) Prioritisation report was requested, which provided the long-term strategic approach to identifying walking, cycling and wheeling infrastructure improvements in the Borough.</p> <p>The LCWIP was presented as a collection of reports prepared in three Phases: • Phase 1 – Baseline Conditions report (published March 2022) • Phase 2 – Blackburn and Darwen network planning reports (published December 2022) • Phase 3 – Prioritisation report (October 2023, subject of this decision) The key output of Phase 3 of the LCWIP was a list of prioritised areas/routes for future infrastructure interventions, providing the focus for investment and further feasibility/design work. to expand capabilities in this area alongside the delivery of infrastructure improvements. The LCWIP Phase 3 Prioritisation report was provided as a Background Paper to the report.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED -</b></p> <p>That the Executive Board:</p> <p>(i) Approves adoption of the LCWIP (Phase 3 report) as the strategic framework for developing future transport policy and programmes of investment around active travel infrastructure for</p>	<b>Approved</b>

	Item	Action
	<p>Blackburn with Darwen;</p> <p>(ii) Notes the outcomes for the prioritisation of the further development of active travel schemes in the Borough, as set out in the Phase 3: Prioritisation report;</p> <p>(iii) Support further investigations/feasibility and design work to be undertaken, as and when resources and budgets allow, to ensure that a pipeline of schemes is developed to a stage ready for any funding applications that may arise;</p> <p>and (iv) Delegate authority to the Strategic Director of Growth and Development, following consultation with the Executive Member for Growth and Development, to submit any future active travel funding applications for developments in line with the LCWIP.</p>	<p><b>Noted</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p>
<p><b>8.8</b></p>	<p><b><u>South East Blackburn LUF Scheme</u></b></p> <p>Members were requested to grant approval for the drawdown of capital funding and approvals required to undertake various activities to support the pre-construction stage of the Blackburn Growth Axis Transport Package (South East) ('Project'). The report also provided an update of the work completed to date since the publication of the previous Executive Board report in May 2023.</p> <p>Councillor John Slater voted against the recommendations in the report.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED -</b></p> <p>That the Executive Board:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Notes the award of £20m Levelling-Up Funding ('LUF') to deliver the Blackburn Growth Axis Transport Package (South East) and the £10.5m upfront payment to date by Department for Levelling-Up, Housing and Communities;</li> <li>2. Notes the progress of the two projects, listed below, comprising the Blackburn Growth Axis Transport Package (South East) LUF scheme:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project 1 – South East Blackburn Active Travel (Walking and Cycling) Network</li> <li>• Project 2 – M65 Junction 5 Improvement Scheme;</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. Notes the appointment of Ramboll engineering consultants by Balfour Beatty following a competitive tendering exercise to support Project 2;</li> <li>4. Approves the appointment of WSP to provide Technical Advisory Support in administering the contract with Balfour Beatty, provide general technical assurance support and assistance in validating technical proposals for future adoption by the Council as Local Highway Authority;</li> </ol>	<p><b>Noted</b></p> <p><b>Noted</b></p> <p><b>Noted</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p>

	Item	Action
	<p>5. Approves a capital budget of £0.75m for Project 1 and £3.25m for Project 2 to cover all pre-construction activities including fees, surveys, site investigations, approvals, service diversions, third party payments and other enabling costs necessary during the pre-construction stage. Note £500k of capital funding is already profiled in the 2023/24 capital programme and therefore an additional £3.5m is now required to cover the pre-construction stage during with £0.7m of this additional funding required in year;</p> <p>6. Authorises the Growth Programme Director in liaison with the Deputy Director of Legal and Governance to finalise any contract terms of the consultant and contractor appointments for Projects 1 and 2 accordingly;</p> <p>7. Authorises the Growth Programme Director to issue contract instructions on behalf of the Council in administering the NEC Professional Services Contracts for Project 2 - M65 J5 Highway Improvement Scheme;</p> <p>8. Authorises the Growth Programme Director in liaison with the Deputy Director of Legal and Governance to finalise the terms of acquisition for any third party land required to deliver the scheme;</p> <p>9. Authorises the Deputy Director of Legal and Governance in liaison with the Growth Programme Director to finalise the terms of the agreement with National Highways for approval to work on their motorway network; and</p> <p>10. Notes further report will be prepared for approval during 2024 to progress schemes to construction once final designs, approvals and construction costs have been finalised.</p>	<p><b>Approved</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p> <p><b>Noted</b></p>
<p><b>8.9</b></p>	<p><b><u>New Building Control Regime</u></b></p> <p>Members were advised that the Building Safety Act (BSA) 2022 came into force in April 2023, and impacted Local Authorities in three main ways: in the delivery of Council-led development projects; the provision of Building Control services applicable to all construction projects requiring Building Regulation approval; and through the Council's relationship with the new Building Safety Regulator (BSR). The new BSR came under the umbrella of the existing Health and Safety Executive.</p> <p>The BSA amended the Building Act 1984 to create powers to prescribe requirements on those who procure, design, plan, manage and undertake building work, also known as duty-holders; and introduces new enforcement powers for building control authorities.</p>	

	Item	Action
	<p><b>RESOLVED –</b></p> <p>That the Executive Board:</p> <p>Notes the impacts of the Building Safety Act and associated regulations on Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council.</p> <p><b>8.10 <u>Infrastructure Funding Statement</u></b></p> <p>The Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) was produced annually and provided a summary of financial contributions the Council had secured within the year (1<sup>st</sup> April – 31<sup>st</sup> March) via Section 106 agreements from new developments for off-site infrastructure works and affordable housing, in addition to highway works completed as part of new developments through Section 278 agreements. It also identified the projects that had been delivered as a result of the contributions across the Borough. The report presented the 2022-23 IFS.</p> <p>Councillor John Slater voted against the recommendations in the report.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED -</b> That the Executive Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approves the publication of the Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) for the 2022/23 monitoring period.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Noted</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p>
	<p><b>8.11 <u>Contract Award for the Revenues and Benefits System</u></b></p> <p>Approval from the Executive Board was sought for the Council to enter into a contract for the provision of a cloud hosted Revenues and Benefits IT system.</p> <p>Prior to the end of the partnership agreement with Capita in 2016, the Council tendered the move to, and the hosting of the Revenues and Benefit IT system in a cloud based solution. This contract was awarded to Northgate Public Services UK Ltd (which renamed itself to NEC Software Solutions UK Ltd) for a 5 year period with the option to extend for a further 2 year period. The current contract was coming to an end on the 26<sup>th</sup> June 2024 and over the last few months the department had been looking at the options available for re-procurement, and the report submitted reported on this process and the recommendations arising.</p> <p>The basis for the recommendations in the report was the assessment that it was not in the interest of the Council to go to tender for this service for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The cost of changing the IT system would outweigh any benefits achieved;</li> <li>• The internal time and cost to change is significant, and;</li> <li>• The current service suitably met needs, and the operational risk would need further evaluation.</li> </ul>	

	Item	Action
	<p><b>RESOLVED –</b></p> <p>That the Executive Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approves the award of the contract for a Revenues and Benefits IT system for a five year period to NEC Software Solutions UK Ltd.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Approved</b></p>
<p><b>9.1</b></p>	<p><b><u>Youth Investment Fund</u></b></p> <p>The Executive Board were asked to note the Council’s successful application to the Youth Investment Fund (YIF); in which the Council had been awarded £4,583,074 in grant funding to support renovations and remodelling of two existing young people assets, specifically Darwen Youth Centre and Audley and Queen’s Park Children Centre. The report also sets out key next steps.</p> <p>In total Blackburn with Darwen had secured £8.3m of Round 2 Youth Investment Fund investment, which represented the largest allocation of funding received by any place in Round 2.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED -</b></p> <p>That the Executive Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the Council’s success in competitively securing YIF funding support for Darwen Youth Centre and Audley and Queen’s Park Children Centre, with the Council acting as the accountable body for this grant funding;</li> <li>• Agree a supplementary capital estimate of £4.583m for the delivery of the projects outlined in the report (funded wholly from the grant provided by the YIF);</li> <li>• Delegate approval to the Strategic Director of Growth and Development to allocate spend of up to 15% of the grant award on costs associated to feasibility and design of the YIF funded projects; and</li> <li>• Delegate responsibility to the Strategic Director for Growth and Development, in consultation with the Executive Member for Growth and Development, to appoint a contractor (subject to a formal procurement process) to support construction programme, as set out in this report.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Noted</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p> <p><b>Approved</b></p>
<p><b>9.2</b></p>	<p><b><u>Business Rates &amp; Sundry Debt Write Offs</u></b></p> <p>This report details the debts that have proved irrecoverable, and, as such, in line with the Financial Procedures Rules were presented to the Executive Board for consideration for write off.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED –</b></p>	

	Item	Action
	<p>That the Executive Board:</p> <p>Approves the write off of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. £214,532.48 in respect of Business Rates</li> <li>2. £71,197.99 in respect of Sundry Debts</li> </ol> <p><b>AT THIS STAGE OF THE PROCEEDINGS THE PRESS AND PUBLIC WERE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEETING.</b></p>	<b>Approved</b>
<b>11.1</b>	<p><b><u>Disposal of Land at Mellor Brook</u></b></p> <p>Further to the report submitted at Agenda Item 8.6 additional information was submitted for consideration by the Executive Board which was considered commercially sensitive and therefore exempt from publication. The resolutions at 8.6 were unchanged.</p>	<b>Approved</b>
<b>11.2</b>	<p><b><u>South East Blackburn LUF Scheme</u></b></p> <p>Further to the report submitted at Agenda Item 8.8 additional information was submitted for consideration by the Executive Board which was considered commercially sensitive and therefore exempt from publication. The resolutions at 8.8 were unchanged.</p> <p>Councillor John Slater voted against the recommendations in the report.</p>	<b>Approved</b>
<b>11.3</b>	<p><b><u>Business Rates and Sundry Debt Write Offs</u></b></p> <p>Further to the report submitted at Agenda Item 9.2 additional information was submitted for consideration by the Executive Board which was considered commercially sensitive and therefore exempt from publication. The resolutions at 9.2 were unchanged.</p> <p>Councillor John Slater requested an analysis of one of the debts referred to in the report.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Signed at a meeting of the Board</p> <p style="text-align: center;">on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2024</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(being the ensuing meeting on the Board)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chair of the meeting at which the Minutes were confirmed</p>	<b>Approved</b>

## DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA

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

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

MEETING: EXECUTIVE BOARD

DATE: 11<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2024

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



<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
<b>LEAD OFFICERS:</b>	Strategic Director of Children & Education (DCS)
<b>DATE:</b>	Thursday, 11 January 2024

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

**SUBJECT: Schools Capital Programme 2023-2024**

### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To present for consideration and approval the capital programme for Schools and Education for 2023-2024 academic year as detailed within this report.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

- 1: Approves the attached list of projects as detailed in Appendix 2 for inclusion in the 2023-2024 Schools and Education capital programme funded from School Condition Allocation and Devolved Formula Capital.
- 2: Approves the variations to the 2022/2023 capital programme for schemes across both Audley Infants and Audley Junior Schools and Meadowhead Infants and Junior Schools.
- 3: Delegates authority to the Strategic Director of Children's & Education in consultation with the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education to undertake the procurement for the works in accordance with the Contracts & Procurement Procedure Rules in the Council's Constitution.
- 4: Subject to (4) below, approves expenditure to be incurred on individual projects, in line with the Council's Financial Procedure Rules.
- 5: Agrees that projects proposed to be funded from s106 Agreements will not commence until funding under those agreements has been received by the Council.
- 6: Notes that reports will be provided for the Executive Member detailing any variations/amendments to programmes of work and seeking necessary approvals where these are required to ensure compliance with financial instructions and the Constitution.

### 3. BACKGROUND

The Council receives capital funding from Government to meet the responsibilities placed upon it by the Education Acts and the School Standards and Framework Act.

Schools Condition Funding – Local Authorities are given an annual funding allocation for Community Controlled and Voluntary Controlled school buildings. This funding is targeted in the first instance at concerns relating to the condition of school buildings as highlighted through individual school's asset management plans. Funding can however also be used to make environmental improvements that will enhance teaching and learning spaces and can also be used to address schools' capacity issues.

Schools Basic Need Funding - this is allocated to LA's based on pupil projection forecasts to specifically support demands for increased capacity for school places. The funding can be used to fund and/or part fund an increase in the capacity of school places at maintained schools, free schools and academies.

### 4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

The Schools and Education capital programme is driven by capital priorities raised from the Condition, Suitability and Sufficiency sections of individual school's asset management plans (AMP's), which are inclusive of information derived from compliance condition/audit reports e.g. asbestos surveys, legionella reports. In addition, the boroughs information on pupil place sufficiency is used to understand the demand for any required school place growth. As set out in the authority's scheme of financial delegation for schools, the Council retains the responsibility for "capital" improvements valued over £10,000 in all schools.

The budgets which will be available in 2023 - 2024 academic year for capital improvement works in the authority's schools (Appendix 1), can be categorised into 2 areas:-

#### 1. Directly Managed

Projects, irrespective of whether internally or externally funded, that are managed by officers from Blackburn with Darwen's Building Consultancy Team.

#### 2. Indirectly Managed

In all cases, officers keep an overview on the individual projects in partnership with other parties i.e. Diocesan Authorities, Academy Trusts.

Details of the proposed new capital programme and associated costs for 2023-2024 academic year are contained in Appendix 1.

In respect of maintained local authority schools (Community & Voluntary Controlled Schools), the School Condition Allocation (SCA) and Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) are £1,317,302 and £217,477 respectively.

In addition, a carry forward of £15,110,935 from the 2022 - 2023 financial period brings the total available budget to £16,645,714.

The capital programme compiled for 2023 - 2024 (Appendix 1) reflects needs in schools, which have been identified through each school's AMP (Asset Management Plan). In line with previous years, schools benefiting from the programme will be expected to contribute to any capital works from either Devolved Formula Capital (DFC), or school reserves. A contribution is required to ensure that the School Condition Allocation funding is spread as far as possible and used in schools that have a commitment to working in partnership with the Council to improve their school buildings. Typically, schools are asked to contribute 10% of the total cost of the scheme. However, for those schemes that are of a high value (where a 10% contribution would be greater than the amount a school is able to

retain and/or the school has no other means of funding), schools will be asked to contribute up to 3 years' worth of their allocated Devolved Formula Capital (DFC).

An allocation of £100k from the 2023 - 2024 Schools Condition Allocation is proposed to address any unforeseen emergency works, including those that compromise health & safety and/or safeguarding regulations. Any works not on the initial planned programme that require urgent attention and funding through this contingency will be reported retrospectively to the Executive board.

## **5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The Council has responsibility to ensure that all allocated funding for maintained sector schools is used in accordance with the associated grant terms and conditions.

### **Performance Implications**

The capital programme, made up of individual projects, will be closely monitored against agreed performance indicators representing measures of quality, cost and timescale.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Existing live capital programme schemes are detailed in Appendix 2 (table a)

The proposed capital programme for the Schools and Education portfolio for the 2022– 2023 academic year, as well as variations to existing schemes, are detailed in Appendix 2 (table b).

The carried forward figure of £15,110,935 includes £3,948,000 in relation to s106 commuted sums, elements of which are due to be received from developers over the next three years. These schemes will not commence until funding under the Agreement has been received by the Council. Indeed, if these monies are not received within the expected timeframes the financing for the schemes they are supporting will need to be reviewed.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The report has been compiled with regard to the Council's Constitution, in particular the Financial Procedure Rules and the Contracts & Procurement Procedure Rules. All procurement and contract activity in connection with this programme must be carried out in accordance with the relevant parts of the constitution and legislation.

All contracts prepared in relation to the programme must be in conjunction with Legal Services/CAPS team.

## **8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

Resource requirements for managing and coordinating the capital programme will be met from within Schools and Education senior leadership team, alongside a funded service agreement with Councils Construction and Facilities 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

All schools who are eligible for funding through the LA's schools capital programme are asked annually to submit their asset management plans which detail required/requested works.

## 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.

<b>VERSION:</b>	<b>1</b>
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<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Carol Grimshaw, Head of Service, Schools System Support</b> <b>Sara Malone, Pupils Place Planning Coordinator</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	7 December 2023
<b>BACKGROUND PAPER:</b>	Appendix 1 – Schools and Education Capital Budgets Appendix 2 - Schools and Education Capital Programme

## Schools and Education Capital Programme 2023-2024

**Budgets Available for Community Sector Capital Improvement Works****2023 - 2024**

		£
School Condition Grant 2023-2024	Confirmed Allocation	1,317,302
Basic Need Grant 2023-2024 (for places required by 2024)	Confirmed Allocation	0
Basic Need Grant 2024-2025 (for places required by 2025)	Confirmed Allocation	0
Capital carried forward into 2023-2024:		
Allocated against committed schemes		4,436,500
Basic Need still to be allocated		1,693,900
Schools Condition Grant still to be allocated		409,698
<b>Total Available Basic Need and School Condition Allocation</b>		<b>7,857,400</b>
<b>Devolved Formula Capital Funding</b>		
Devolved Formula Capital 2023-2024	Confirmed Allocation	217,477
Capital carried forward into 2023-2024:		
Allocated against committed schemes		246,000
School Contribution		0
Devolved Formula Capital still to be allocated		704,723
<b>Total Available Devolved Formula Capital</b>		<b>1,168,200</b>
<b>2 Year Old Places Grant</b>		
2 Year Old Places Grant	Confirmed Allocation	0
Capital carried forward into 2023-2024:		
Allocated against committed schemes		49,000
2 Year Old Places Grant still to be allocated		0
<b>Total Available Special Educational Needs (SEN) Grant</b>		<b>49,000</b>
<b>High Needs Provision Capital Grant</b>		
Capital carried forward into 2023-2024:		
Allocated against committed schemes		3,623,114
High Needs Provision Grant still to be allocated		0
<b>Total Available High Needs Provision Grant</b>		<b>3,623,114</b>
<b>Section 106 funding</b>		
s106 funding	Expected Allocation	0
Capital carried forward into 2023-2024:		
Allocated against committed schemes		3,948,000
s106 funding still to be allocated		0
<b>Total Available Section 106 funding</b>		<b>3,948,000</b>
<b>Estimated Budget for 2023-2024</b>		<b>16,645,714</b>
NB - Funds directly managed by the Schools and Education Portfolio		

# Schools and Education Capital Programme 2023 - 2024

## LIVE PROJECTS

Project	Description	Funding Source	Spend Profile 2023-24					Total £		
			Basic Need	Schools	Two Year	Special	High Needs		Section 106	DFC/School
			£	Condition £	Old Places £	Provision Fund (SEND) £	Provision £		Funding £	Cont £
Lammack Primary School	Extension and remodel (additional places in line with housing growth)	s106	277,300							277,300
St Barnabas and St Pauls CE Darwen East	New build and extension to provide extra places Additional places in line with housing growth	Basic Need s106	135,083							135,083
Longshaw Nursery	Relocation	s106 / Basic Need / 2 Year Old	44,400	354,000	49,000			3,250,000		3,250,000
Shadsworth Infant School	Extension and remodel (SEND)	SPF (SEND) / SCA / Basic Need	115,200	19,600				198,000	33,900	679,300
Ashleigh	Heating and Ventilation	SCA / DFC		31,500					3,500	134,800
Audley Infants	Replacement of Fascias & Soffits	SCA		55,000						35,000
Audley Infants & Juniors	Replacing Windows & upstandings to lean-to roof structure	SCA / DFC		54,000					6,000	55,000
Avondale	Resurface Playground	SCA / DFC		131,600					16,500	60,000
Brookhouse Primary (Nursery)	Replace Roof System	SCA / DFC		67,500					7,500	148,100
Brookhouse Primary	Replace Boilers	SCA / DFC		73,400					8,700	75,000
Longshaw Juniors	Replace Fire Alarm System	SCA / DFC		36,000					4,000	82,100
Roe Lee Park Primary	Roofing, upstandings and windows	SCA / DFC		171,300					19,500	40,000
Roe Lee Park Primary	Repairs to service road, external areas & automated gates	SCA / DFC		97,900						190,800
Shadsworth Juniors	Replacement of boilers	SCA / DFC		36,000					4,000	97,900
Meadowhead Infants	Drainage installations	SCA / DFC		200					2,000	40,000
Stansfeld Centre / St Thomas Centre	Refurbishment to create additional alternative school provision capacity	High Needs	276,900					723,100		2,200
Newfield School	Repairs to the roof of the complex needs building	SCA / DFC		225,000					25,000	2,000
Brookhouse School	Repairs to the MUGA pitch	SCA		11,000						250,000
Belmont Primary School	Replacement of boiler	SCA / DFC		31,500					3,500	11,000
Longshaw Junior School	Replacement of water main	SCA / DFC							2,300	35,000
Audley Infants	Culvert severe water leak when heavy rain occurs. Effecting neighbours on backstreet.	SCA / DFC		18,000					2,000	2,300
Audley Infants	Dining Room floor cover lifting in places & gas meter / boiler works.	SCA / DFC		27,000					3,000	20,000
Audley Junior	Ventilation & heat recovery work	SCA / DFC		9,100					900	30,000
Avondale	Rebuild steps	SCA / DFC		9,100					900	10,000
Belmont	Reslate Roof Including All Lead Work To Numerous Valleys Flashings and Bell Tower	SCA / DFC		30,000					3,000	10,000
Brookhouse Main School	Upgrade lighting	SCA / DFC		34,200					3,800	33,000
Brookhouse Main School	Kitchen upgrades	SCA / DFC		45,000					5,000	38,000
Brookhouse Main School	Replace windows and doors	SCA / DFC		9,000					1,000	50,000
Daisyfield Primary	Replace External doors	SCA / DFC		13,500					1,500	10,000
Daisyfield Primary	SEND works - DDA Compliance	SCA / DFC		30,000					3,000	15,000
Feniscowles Juniors	Upgrade windows	SCA / DFC		19,700					3,000	33,000
Lammack Primary	Security Fencing & electronic gates around perimeter of school.	SCA / DFC								22,700
Lammack Primary	Mentioned in SIP & Safeguarding Audit	SCA / DFC		200,000					20,000	220,000
Lammack Primary	Resurface playground	SCA / DFC		36,000					4,000	40,000
Lower Darwen Primary	SEND works - DDA Compliance	SCA / DFC		36,000					4,000	40,000
Lower Darwen Primary	Fire Risk Assessment works	SCA / DFC		22,500					2,500	40,000
Lower Darwen Primary	Perimeter fencing - Repair/Replace	SCA / DFC		9,000					1,000	25,000
Meadowhead Infants	Replace external rubber flooring	SCA / DFC		9,000					1,000	10,000
Meadowhead Juniors	Replace floor covering to hall	SCA / DFC		5,000					2,000	10,000
Meadowhead Juniors	Replace doors and roller shutters	SCA / DFC		11,900					1,500	7,000
Meadowhead Juniors and Infants	External path works	SCA / DFC		45,000					5,000	13,400
Meadowhead Juniors	Fire Risk Assessment ceiling works	SCA / DFC		18,000					2,000	50,000
Roe Lee Park Primary	Toilet works	SCA / DFC		18,000					2,000	20,000
Shadsworth Juniors	SEND works - DDA Compliance	SCA / DFC		51,300					5,700	20,000
St Michael With St John CE Primary	Roofing works	SCA / DFC		135,000					15,000	20,000
Newfield School	Remodel to create places	Basic Need / High Needs	300,000					2,000,000		25,000
QEGS	Reconfigure layout to create additional places	Basic Need / s106	330,000					220,000		4,000
Witton Academy	Reconfiguration and refurbishment	Basic Need / s106	389,900					260,100		40,000
St Wilfrids	Refurbishment to create an additional classroom	Basic Need / s106	29,800					19,900		40,000
Intack Primary	Replacement boilers	SCA / DFC		61,200					6,800	49,700
Crosshill	To create additional places	High Needs						900,000		68,000
Roe Lee Park Primary	Fencing	SCA / DFC		90,000					10,000	900,000
Project Management Fee		Various	25,000	25,000						100,000
Contingency budget	For emergency H&S, Compliance and safeguarding works)	SCA		100,000						50,000

	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,923,583</b>	<b>2,513,000</b>	<b>49,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3,623,100</b>	<b>3,948,000</b>	<b>246,000</b>	<b>12,302,683</b>
	<b>TOTAL LIVE PROJECTS</b>	<b>1,923,583</b>	<b>2,513,000</b>	<b>49,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3,623,100</b>	<b>3,948,000</b>	<b>246,000</b>	<b>12,302,683</b>

**NEW PROJECTS & VARIATIONS TO EXISTING PROJECTS**

			Spend Profile 2023-24							
Project	Description	Funding Source								Total £
			Basic Need £	Schools Condition £	Two Year Old Places £	Special Provision Fund (SEND) £	High Needs Provision £	Section 106 Funding £	DFC/School Cont £	
<b>Variations to existing schemes</b>										
Audley Juniors & Infants	Windows	SCA / DFC		126,000					14,000	140,000
Meadowhead Juniors and Infants	External path works	SCA / DFC		18,000					2,000	20,000
<b>New schemes</b>										
Newfield	New surface drainage	SCA / DFC		22,500					2,500	25,000
St Michael With St John CE Primary	New boiler	SCA / DFC		54,000					6,000	60,000
Avondale	Remodel of toilets Lower KS2	SCA / DFC		28,800					3,200	32,000
Avondale	Remodel of toilets Upper KS2	SCA / DFC		28,800					3,200	32,000
Avondale	Rebuild steps and wall	SCA / DFC		22,500					2,500	25,000
Shadsworth Juniors	Windows	SCA / DFC		73,800					8,200	82,000
Shadsworth Juniors	New boiler	SCA / DFC		162,000					18,000	180,000
Ashleigh	Heating and windows	SCA / DFC		16,200					1,800	18,000
St Thomas Centre / PRU	Roofing	SCA / DFC		72,000					8,000	80,000
St Thomas Centre / PRU	Traffic Management	SCA		10,000						10,000
Longshaw Juniors	Convert oil fired boilers to gas	SCA / DFC		54,000					6,000	60,000
Audley Infants	Toilets	SCA / DFC		16,200					1,800	18,000
Audley Juniors	Fencing	SCA / DFC		18,000					2,000	20,000
Meadowhead Infants	Emergency lighting in Nursery class	SCA / DFC		9,000					1,000	10,000
Meadowhead Infants	Entrance door, paving and footpaths	SCA / DFC		56,700					6,300	63,000
Griffin	Roofing	SCA / DFC		180,000					20,000	200,000
Griffin	Fencing	SCA / DFC		10,800					1,200	12,000
Pontack	Heating controls	SCA / DFC		27,000					3,000	30,000
Daisyfield Primary	Main entrance	SCA / DFC		135,000					15,000	150,000
Daisyfield Primary	Fencing	SCA / DFC		21,600					2,400	24,000
Lammack	Remedial works from Fire Risk Assessment	SCA / DFC		45,000					5,000	50,000
Lammack	Car park lighting	SCA / DFC		13,500					1,500	15,000
St Thomas CE	Fencing	SCA / DFC		36,000					4,000	40,000
Turton Edgworth	Fencing	SCA / DFC		49,500					5,500	55,000
Turton Edgworth	Drainage	SCA / DFC		10,800					1,200	12,000
<b>TOTAL NEW PROJECTS</b>			<b>0</b>	<b>1,317,700</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>145,300</b>	<b>1,463,000</b>
<b>UNALLOCATED GRANTS REMAINING</b>			<b>1,693,900</b>	<b>409,217</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>776,900</b>	<b>2,880,031</b>
<b>CONFIRMED FUTURE YEARS ALLOCATIONS</b>			<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>TOTAL BUDGET</b>			<b>3,617,483</b>	<b>4,239,917</b>	<b>49,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3,623,114</b>	<b>3,948,000</b>	<b>1,168,200</b>	<b>16,645,714</b>

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## EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Executive Member for Public Health, Prevention & Wellbeing
<b>LEAD OFFICERS:</b>	Director of Public Health
<b>DATE:</b>	Thursday, 11 January 2024

<b>PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:</b>	Public Health Prevention and Wellbeing
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	(All Wards);
<b>KEY DECISION:</b>	Y

**SUBJECT: Blackburn with Darwen Sexual Health Strategy 2023 - 2028**

### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The new sexual health strategy aims to promote accessible and equitable sexual health services for all individuals in Blackburn with Darwen regardless of race, ethnicity, sexuality or socioeconomic status.

Our integrated sexual health offer is promoted across the life course and includes access to education, prevention, testing, and treatment. We will work collaboratively with local healthcare providers, community organisations, and stakeholders to ensure that sexual health services are tailored to meet the specific needs of our diverse populations.

Through proactive education, we will empower individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to make informed decisions about their sexual health. By partnering with schools and community organisations, we will promote open dialogue, challenge stigma, and encourage positive relationships, health and sex education.

Our aim is that Blackburn with Darwen is a place where sexual health and safe healthy relationships can be openly discussed and embraced, creating an environment that encourages prevention and promotes a culture of care and respect. To achieve our vision, we are dedicated to expanding access to testing and treatment services. We will reach out further to engage with vulnerable and diverse communities, ensuring that testing services are easily accessible, culturally sensitive, and non-judgmental.

We will remove barriers and increase awareness about sexual health, we aspire to increase sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing rates, leading to early diagnosis, prompt treatment, and prevention to stop the spread of infections.

We are committed to tackling the onward transmission of HIV through innovative prevention strategies and early intervention. By partnering with key stakeholders, community organisations, and individuals living with HIV, we will work collaboratively to increase awareness of prevention methods such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and promote regular testing for early diagnosis.

We will improve sexual health and reduce unintended pregnancies through the promotion of Long-Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC) uptake in General Practitioners (GPs) and Sexual Health services (SHS). By working collaboratively to remove barriers to access, we aim to empower individuals to make informed choices regarding their reproductive health.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

- Commits to the sexual health priorities and objectives contained within this strategy.
- Approves the sexual health strategy

## 3. BACKGROUND

The previous sexual health strategy expired in 2020 and due to the Covid 19 pandemic the development of this new strategy was delayed. In the absence of a new national sexual health framework, this strategy has been based on local data, national reports, and guidance relevant to sexual health

This new strategy communicates how we will meet the sexual health related needs of our residents and how we work in partnership to improve and promote good sexual health across Blackburn with Darwen.

Based on the analysis of public health data and insights captured through the strategy consultation process, the following areas have been identified as core priorities for this sexual health strategy:

- **Control and prevent the transmission of STIs**
  - The proportion of 15-24 year old's tested for chlamydia is significantly worse than the national rate and has been for many years.
  - The STI testing rate of those under 25 in the borough has been significantly worse than the national average.
  - Since 2018, there have been between 200-300 diagnoses of chlamydia among 15 to 24 year olds per year within sexual health services (SHS), with the current rate of detection amongst the lowest amongst authorities in the North West.
- **Combat HIV through early detection, prevention, treatment & care, & reducing stigma**
  - In 2021, 112 people in the borough were living with a HIV diagnosis, with 93 people aged from 15 to 59.
  - In 2021, 582 people (33.1% of those eligible) took a HIV test in 2021 in SHS settings.
  - Testing coverage amongst men (60.2%) is similar to the national figure (62.8%). Rates are significantly lower amongst women with only 20.8% eligible testing compared to 36.6% nationally.
- **Improve reproductive health and reduce unintended pregnancies**
  - There were 42 pregnancies amongst under 18's, (with 4 amongst under 16's specifically) a rate of 12.6 per 1,000 in 2021, not dis-similar from the national figure (13.1 per 1,000).
  - There were 21 births registered to women under 18. This means that in 2021/22, 1.1% of births in the borough were to teenage mothers, higher than the national figure of 0.6%.
  - In 2021, there were 630 abortions of those aged 15-44 living in the borough, meaning the rate of abortion was above the national average.
- **Promote healthy, safe relationships**

- The 2021 BWD School Health Needs Assessment (SHNA) surveyed 463 young people in year 9, 24% of young people did not know where to go for advice and information about relationships and sexual health.
- Hospital admissions for violence (including sexual violence) are in the lowest percentile in England with 83.8 per 100,000.
- In terms of the rate of sexual offences - the borough's rate (3.4 per 1,000) is slightly higher than England (3.2 per 1,000) in the 2021/22 period.

Our vision for sexual health in Blackburn with Darwen is that;

**'All our residents have equal access to sexual health services throughout their life and that they can enjoy a life of good sexual health, free from prejudice or bias'**

Our vision will be achieved through the six core objectives aligned to each sexual health priority:

- educate & inform
- increase access
- prevent & promote
- test and treat
- include and collaborate

Our commitment to the inclusivity of marginalised communities serves as the golden thread woven throughout the priorities identified in this strategy. We strive to ensure all residents have equal access to sexual health services throughout their life and that they can enjoy a life of sexual health, free from prejudice or bias.

See the Joint Strategic Sexual Health Needs Assessment for a comprehensive overview of the sexual health issues for Blackburn with Darwen: <https://www.blackburn.gov.uk/health/health-strategy-and-reports/joint-strategic-needs-assessment>

#### **4.KEY ISSUES & RISKS**

This five year strategy is a forward thinking approach, it is one that strives for better sexual health for the residents of Blackburn with Darwen. To achieve this vision we must continue to commission sexual health services and to ensure we have resource, leadership and ambition to drive this agenda forwards.

#### **5.POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The Blackburn with Darwen sexual health strategy is a local response to the national Public Health Outcomes Framework and the Local Government Public Health Functions Regulations.

The Local Authorities (Public Health Functions and Entry to Premises by Local Health watch Representatives) Regulations 2013 require local authorities to arrange for the provision of certain services, including sexual health services<sup>1</sup>

The Regulation set out local authorities' responsibilities to provide open access sexual health services including contraceptive services<sup>2</sup>. This includes addressing long-term funding and capacity challenges across local authority commissioned sexual health services<sup>3</sup>.

## National

- [Commissioning Sexual Health services and interventions \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)
- [Making it work Annexes FINAL.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)
- [Breaking point: Securing the future of sexual health services | Local Government Association](https://www.local.gov.uk)

## Local

- **Blackburn with Darwen Joint Strategy Sexual Health Needs Assessment**  
<https://www.blackburn.gov.uk/health/health-strategy-and-reports/joint-strategic-needs-assessment>

## 6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None relating directly to this strategy. The delivery of this strategy will utilise existing public health resources and officer time.

## 7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 transferred various public health duties/functions set out in the NHS Act 2006 from the NHS/Secretary of State to Local Government in 2013. Fuller details of local authorities' new legal duties were set out in additional legislation.

The Local Authorities (Public Health Functions and entry to Premises by Local Healthwatch Representatives) Regulations 2013 stipulate that local authorities shall provide or commission arrangements for the provision of open access sexual health services in their area and specify that certain services must be provided within those open access sexual health services.

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council fulfils its statutory duties and responsibilities by:

- Commissioning Brook to deliver comprehensive open access sexual health services, including free STI testing and treatment, notification of sexual partners of infected persons, and advice on/free provision of contraception.
- Commissioning Brook to deliver integrated specialist services across the life course, such as young people's sexual health, advice on preventing unintended pregnancies, and access to contraception, teenage pregnancy services, outreach, HIV prevention including PEP/PrEP, sexual health promotion, services in schools, colleges, and pharmacies and outreach to vulnerable communities.
- Commissioning Brook to deliver sexual health aspects of psychosexual counselling and HIV social care.
- Collaborating with the ICS and NHS England to ensure seamless pathways of care for sexual and reproductive health services, such as abortion, sterilisation, vasectomy, HIV treatment and care, cervical screening and sexual assault referral centres.

## 8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The Public Health team are co-ordinating all interventions.

A new sexual health alliance will be formed and will meet on an annual basis with the aim of updating stakeholders on progress, providing training and relevant updates and to explore the wider agenda of sexual health within in Blackburn with Darwen.

Alongside this, specific sexual health working groups meet quarterly to work collaboratively on the priorities contained within this strategy. The groups will include:

- Street sex worker forum (already in existence)
- PSHE network with an increased focus on RSE (already in existence)
- HIV (new group to be formed)

The implementation of the alliance and working groups will be resourced through existing resources in the public health 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

In total over 150 people were involved throughout the consultation phase.

- Digital survey promoted across multiple and varied stakeholders (young people and adults)
- In person focus group with communities of lived experience (HIV specific)
- In person, consultation hosted via Blackburn with Darwen Youth Forum
- In person consultation with young person SEND consultation held in Darwen
- Stakeholder engagement event attended by over 60 professionals and supported by Councillor Damian Talbot

Appendix 2 sets out responses from the digital survey relating to challenges/barriers in relation to sexual health.

## 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.

<b>VERSION:</b>	<b>3</b>
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<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Natalie Dodd, Hayley Kilpatrick, Sam Riley</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	28 <sup>th</sup> November 2023
<b>BACKGROUND PAPER:</b>	

# Blackburn with Darwen

## Sexual Health Strategy 2023 - 2028



EDUCATE & INFORM



ACCESS



PREVENT & PROMOTE



TEST & TREAT



INCLUDE



COLLABORATE

WHERE are your COMMUNITIES NOW & IN THE FUTURE?

# EXPLORING SEXUAL HEALTH IN BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN

Let's talk about **STD DATA**

## SEXUAL HEALTH STRATEGY WORKSHOP

HOLISTIC

WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT THAT GENITAL WARTS WOULD BE A GOOD NEWS STORY?

SEXUAL HEALTH IS A STATE OF PHYSICAL, MENTAL & SOCIAL WELLBEING IN RELATION TO SEXUALITY

MAKE SEXUAL HEALTH SEXY!

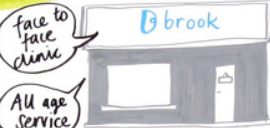
Who do we need to REACH out to DIFFERENTLY

IMPLANT & COIL

we'd like to ENSURE that every WOMAN in PRIMARY CARE has a choice where they are fitted

we CARE about OUR RESIDENTS

HIV



face to face clinic  
All age service

DOING IT IN A SAFER WAY



Renaissance UK



we put POSTERS on TOILET DOORS

Not every PRACTICE has a FITTER



ACCESSIBILITY

I WAS SHOCKED by the STIGMA & DISCRIMINATION TOWARDS OUR HIV RESIDENTS



we NEED to CREATE meaningful & lasting change

we interlink with other teams v.well PARTNERSHIP

L.A.R.C. CO-DESIGN

Normalise conversations around SEX & SEXUAL HEALTH Multi-agency approach

be aware of CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

be aware of COERCIVE behaviour & DOMESTIC ABUSE

WOMENS HUB

MENS HUB

STI's

changing OUR NARRATIVE & PERCEPTION

Making sure YOUNG PEOPLE get the INFORMATION they need to navigate their way



SH:24

BOTTOM UP APPROACH

EDUCATION and KNOWLEDGE



INCLUSIVITY & DIVERSITY

SEX can MEAN SO MUCH to DIFFERENT PEOPLE

EARLY INTERVENTION



Drawn By Becky & Holly from [WWW.MORETHANMINUTES.CO.UK](http://WWW.MORETHANMINUTES.CO.UK)



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# Foreword



It is with great pleasure that I introduce this new Sexual Health Strategy for Blackburn with Darwen.

This strategic document demonstrates our commitment to the fundamental right to good sexual health for every individual in our community.

This strategy represents a collective vision, that recognises that sexual health is a vital component of our overall wellbeing. The development of this strategy has been supported by the engagement of over one hundred and fifty stakeholders. Their voices have been heard through digital surveys, focus groups and stakeholder workshops. These diverse perspectives have brought to light the varied needs and challenges that our community faces regarding sexual health. The invaluable insights, expertise, and lived experiences shared have increased our understanding and awareness, ensuring that this strategy is not just data driven but rooted in the real-world context of Blackburn with Darwen.

This Sexual Health Strategy for Blackburn with Darwen is a visionary roadmap towards a community where sexual health is not just prioritised, but celebrated. It envisions a borough where every individual can lead a healthy and fulfilling sexual life, free from stigma and barriers.

The work does not end here. We move forward with the knowledge that our strategy must be capable of evolving with our community's changing needs and the advances that occur within sexual health. We commit to continuous adaptation, ensuring that our goals are achieved and that our services remain at the forefront of best practice.

This is a shared vision, one that we can only make a reality through collective effort and mutual support. Together, with the strong foundation of stakeholder engagement we strive to achieve excellence in sexual health services for Blackburn with Darwen residents.

**Cllr Damian Talbot**  
**Executive Member for Public Health and Wellbeing**

# Executive Summary



This sexual health strategy aims to promote accessible and equitable sexual health services for all individuals in Blackburn with Darwen regardless of race, ethnicity, sexuality or socioeconomic status.

Our integrated sexual health offer is promoted across the life course and includes access to education, prevention, testing, and treatment. We will work collaboratively with local healthcare providers, community organisations, and stakeholders to ensure that sexual health services are tailored to meet the specific needs of our diverse populations.

Through proactive education, we will empower individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to make informed decisions about their sexual health. By partnering with schools and community organisations, we will promote open dialogue, challenge stigma, and encourage positive relationships, health and sex education.

Our aim is that Blackburn with Darwen is a place where sexual health and safe healthy relationships can be openly discussed and embraced, creating an environment that encourages prevention and promotes a culture of care and respect.

To achieve our vision, we are dedicated to expanding access to testing and treatment services.

We will reach out further to engage with vulnerable and diverse communities, ensuring that testing services are easily accessible, culturally sensitive, and non-judgmental.

We will remove barriers and increase awareness about sexual health, we aspire to increase sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing rates, leading to early diagnosis, prompt treatment, and prevention to stop the spread of infections.

We are committed to tackling the onward transmission of HIV through innovative prevention strategies and early intervention. By partnering with key stakeholders, community organisations, and individuals living with HIV, we will work collaboratively to increase awareness of prevention methods such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and promote regular testing for early diagnosis.

We will improve sexual health and reduce unintended pregnancies through the promotion of Long-Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC) uptake in General Practitioners (GPs) and Sexual Health services (SHS). By working collaboratively to remove barriers to access, we aim to empower individuals to make informed choices regarding their reproductive health.

**Abdul Razaq**  
**Director of Public Health**

# Sexual health is..



A state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.



# Our vision for sexual health

We recognise and celebrate the diversity in our communities, envisioning a borough that champions inclusivity, actively reduces stigma and discrimination, and prioritises the sexual well-being of all.

Our commitment to achieving this involves a comprehensive, collaborative inclusive, and strategic approach that promotes sexual health, well-being, and positive relationships for every individual in our community.

Our vision is that all our residents have equal access to sexual health services throughout their life and they can enjoy a life of good sexual health, free from prejudice or bias.

## OUR VISION

## Objectives



### EDUCATE & INFORM

Provide education, support, and age-appropriate and accessible information on sexual and reproductive health.



### ACCESS

Expand access to sexual health services, ensuring residents have convenient, safe, and confidential options to address their sexual health needs.



### PREVENT & PROMOTE

Promote healthy, safe relationships and prevent unintended pregnancies and STIs.



### TEST & TREAT

Expand testing and treatment options to further reach vulnerable and marginalised communities.



### INCLUDE

Champion inclusivity, confront stigma, and deepen understanding through listening to the voices of our communities.



### COLLABORATE

Collaborate and work in partnership to respond to the unique sexual health needs and challenges of our communities.

# National Guidance & Principles



EDUCATE & INFORM



ACCESS



PREVENT & PROMOTE



TEST & TREAT



INCLUDE



COLLABORATE

# National context

At a local level, this strategy has been developed alongside the Blackburn with Darwen Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), The Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and also local sexual health data. At a national level, this strategy is underpinned by the National Framework for Sexual Health Improvement in England, NICE Quality Standards, and the UKHSA / Office for Health Improvement and Disparities OHID (OHID) Sexual and Reproductive Health Profiles.

Particular focus has been considered in relation to:

The Public Health Outcomes Framework (PHOF) Healthy lives, healthy people: Improving outcomes and supporting transparency sets out a vision for public health, desired outcomes and the indicators that will help us understand how well public health is being improved and protected. The PHOF sets out specific priorities and indicators to improve public health, and it includes indicators related to sexual health, such as reducing the rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and increasing access to sexual health services.

Sexual and reproductive health and HIV: applying All Our Health provides information on how to improve sexual and reproductive health and reduce the transmission of HIV in England.

The Women's Health Strategy places a strong emphasis on the way the Government listens to voices of women and girls in order to create improvements in the healthcare system. The strategy focuses on the importance of sexual and reproductive health as a key component of women's overall well-being. It recognises that women's sexual health needs are diverse and that they require access to comprehensive sex education, contraception, reproductive healthcare services, and support alliances. In Blackburn with Darwen we recognise the significance of this work and will align the priority of reproductive health and unintended pregnancies with this wider and exciting agenda.

Towards Zero is the Government's action plan which aims to achieve zero new HIV infections, AIDS and HIV related deaths in England by 2030, with ambitious interim targets set for 2025. The HIV Action Plan focuses on the four core themes – prevent, test, treat and retain. In Blackburn with Darwen, we are committed to working Towards Zero and creating an environment where education, prevention, testing, and treatment of HIV go hand in hand with reducing stigma for individuals living with HIV.



# Relationships, Sex and Health Education



In Blackburn with Darwen, we recognise that safeguarding children and young people from harm is of paramount importance. We know that good quality Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) provides a foundation for safeguarding and it provides children young people with the knowledge, skills and understanding to respect themselves, and others, navigate personal relationships and make informed decisions about relationships and sexual health.

RSHE also provides an opportunity to educate about the risk and dangers associated with the digital world where young people today encounter pornography at an increasingly early age, often before receiving formal education about relationships or sex. This unfiltered exposure can result in distorted perceptions of intimacy, consent, body image, and sexual expectations. We recognise the widespread access to pornography and its potential impact on children and young people.

In the delivery of RSHE it is important to acknowledge parental concerns regarding the teaching of this topic, yet essential to emphasise that RSHE is not about encouraging promiscuity, or promoting ideologies, but safeguarding children and young people from harm.

Evidence has show the protective nature of RSHE and how it can safeguard children from misinformation, potential harm, and exploitation. Independent and published research from a wide range of credible sources in the UK demonstrate that RSHE contributes to improved physical and mental health for children and young people. When young people have received RSHE, they are:

- More likely to seek help or speak out.
- More likely to practice safe sex and have improved health outcomes.
- More likely to have consented to first sex, and for first sex to happen at an older age.
- More likely to have an understanding of digital safety in regard to relationships and sex.
- More knowledgeable and aware of discrimination, gender equity and sexual rights.
- Less likely to be a victim or perpetrator of sexual violence.



# Commissioning responsibilities



## Local Authorities:

Local authorities in the UK have various responsibilities for commissioning of sexual health services, depending on the type and level of the service.

In Blackburn with Darwen we commission:

- open access sexual health services, including free STI testing and treatment, notification of sexual partners of infected persons and free provision of contraception.
- specialist services, such as young people's sexual health, teenage pregnancy services, outreach, HIV prevention, sexual health promotion, services in schools, colleges and pharmacies.
- psychosexual counselling and HIV social care.

We collaborate with integrated care systems (ICSs) and NHS England to ensure seamless pathways of care for sexual and reproductive health services, such as abortion, sterilisation, vasectomy, HIV treatment and care, cervical screening and sexual assault referral centers.

Some specialised services are directly commissioned regionally by Integrated Care Systems (ICSs), Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and at the national level by NHS England.

## NHS England commissions:

- Contraception provided as an additional service under the GP contract.
- Promotion of opportunistic testing and treatment for STIs and patient-requested testing by GPs.
- Sexual health elements of prison health services.
- Sexual assault referral centers.
- Cervical screening/HPV vaccination.
- Specialist fetal medicine services.

## ICB / ICS

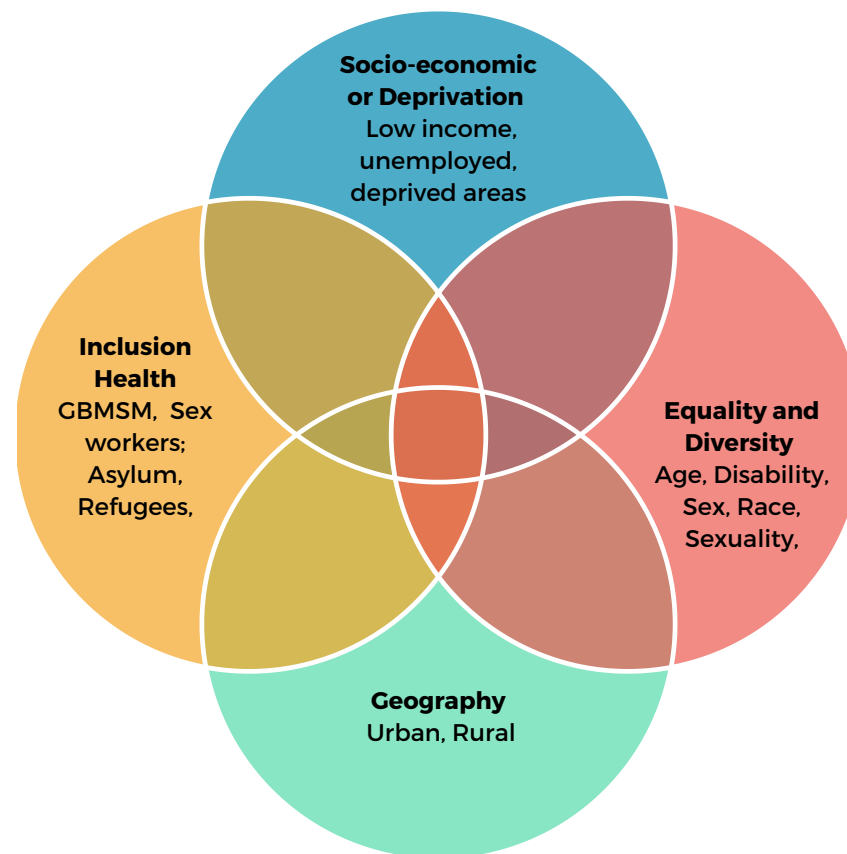
- Contraception provided as an additional service under the GP contract (primary care commissioning).
- Promotion of opportunistic testing and treatment for STIs and patient-requested testing by GPs (primary care commissioning).
- HIV treatment and care.
- Women's health.
- Most abortion services, sterilisation, vasectomy, non-sexual-health elements of psychosexual health services, gynecologic including any use of contraception for non-contraceptive purposes.

# Tackling health inequalities

Sexual health is a vital component of overall well-being, encompassing physical, emotional, and social aspects of an individual's life. To improve sexual health in Blackburn with Darwen we must focus our efforts on addressing the health inequalities that exist within our communities:

- Increase knowledge and access to PrEP and PEP
- Ensure that young people receive good quality RSHE and access to contraception and sexual health services.
- Deliver targeted outreach in public sex environments to reach out to GBMSM
- Control and prevent the transmission of STIs through increasing the uptake of vaccinations e.g. HPV vaccines, Hep A/B, gonorrhoea and promoting regular testing- including self testing
- Develop satellite sexual health services delivered in different locations and community settings.
- Support the development of the Women's Health Hubs.
- Expand the community pharmacy scheme so that emergency areas.
- Involve communities of lived experience in research, design, delivery, and evaluation of sexual health programs.
- Provide innovative digital solutions for sexual health alongside traditional sexual health services.
- Understand the needs and behaviours of communities to ensure services are sensitive inclusive to diverse community needs.

To address health inequalities it is important to understand the complexities of people's lives and how various forms of inequality intersect to affect sexual health outcomes.



# Trauma informed sexual health



Half of adults (48%) in the UK have experienced at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) in their childhood or adolescence\*

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are defined as highly stressful events or situations that occur during childhood and/or adolescence, which can be a single event or incident, or prolonged threats to someone's safety, security or bodily integrity.

It's important to recognise that each individual's experience is unique, and trauma's impact on sexual health and relationships can vary widely.

By identifying trauma-informed sex positivity\* as a central guiding public health value, and incorporating trauma-informed approaches within our sexual health offer it not only benefits trauma survivors but also contributes to creating an inclusive, empathetic integrated sexual health service for individuals.

In Blackburn with Darwen our offer will:

- Promote a culture of respect, empathy, and understanding towards individuals seeking sexual health services, regardless of their experiences.

- Ensure all sexual health resources are trauma-informed, taking into account the potential triggers and vulnerabilities associated with trauma.
- Ensure all services that contribute towards sexual health in Blackburn with Darwen are trauma-informed, signposting towards training and resources to further build capacity



# Sexual health across the life course



Sex and sexuality are fundamental aspects of human life which are influenced by a range of individual, social, cultural, and environmental factors experienced uniquely at different stages of life. Our life course approach recognises that sexual health is not static, and it evolves throughout the life course, and that interventions and strategies to promote sexual health must also be adapted and responsive to the changing needs of individuals over time. By delivering integrated sexual health services across the "Start Well, Live Well, Age Well" agenda we aim to empower individuals to lead fulfilling and healthy sexual lives.

## **Start Well:**

Starting well in life involves having a safe and solid foundation for physical and emotional health, including healthy habits and relationships influenced by parents and guardians. The knowledge, skills and attitudes required for happy, healthy relationships are influenced by a range of factors. In partnership we aim to ensure that young people receive age-appropriate Relationships Sex and Health Education (RSHE) and access to youth friendly preventative and support services to equip them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to achieve healthy, safe relationships and positive sexual health.

## **Live Well:**

Living well involves the promotion of healthy relationships, and an understanding of and access to contraception, empowering individuals to make informed choices about their reproductive and sexual health whilst preventing unintended pregnancies. It encourages regular screening to detect and address potential issues early on and promotes regular testing as a positive intervention to protect and prevent the further spread of infection and to stop the spread of disease.

## **Age Well:**

Older people's sexuality is often ignored or marginalised and the age well agenda recognises that sexual health remains important as individuals age. This includes providing age appropriate information addressing age-specific concerns, providing information on intimacy and sexual well-being, and continued access to testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections.

# Our Residents & Our Response



EDUCATE &  
INFORM



ACCESS



PREVENT &  
PROMOTE



TEST &  
TREAT



INCLUDE



COLLABORATE

# Our residents

Source: Census 2021, Office for National Statistics



Page 46

## Population of BwD

### Population

BwD had a total resident population of 155,762 as of March 2021 with the highest proportion of 0-15's in the North West and a median age of 37 years.

### Ethnicity

35.7% of the population identify as Asian/Asian British & just over 60% of the population identify as 'White'

### Religion

38% of people identify as Christian and 35% identify as Muslim & just over 21% of people have no religion

### Deprivation

The borough is relatively deprived, with a third of the borough's lower super output areas (LSOAs) among the most deprived decile of LSOAs nationally

### Disability

20.7% of borough residents are disabled/day-to-day activities are limited a lot or a little.

### LGBTQ+

Around 2500 residents identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Around 650 people stated their sex was registered different from their sex at birth

### Employment

Just over 51% aged 16 & over, are in employment. Lower than the national average of just over 55%

### Drugs & Alcohol

In 2021/22, there were over 1,200 adults & 35 children (<18) in treatment for drug & alcohol issues

# Key population factors in sexual health



- **Age** – STIs are a leading cause of infectious disease among young people, with re-infections potentially affecting fertility and reflecting unhealthy relationships or poor sexual health knowledge. However, STI rates are also increasing among older adults.
- **Gender** - About 45% of pregnancies are unplanned, leading to potential health risks like postnatal depression and low birth weight. Additionally, one in four women face sexual assault as adults. Men who have sex with men (MSM) are more prone to mental health issues and substance abuse.
- **Socio-economic groups** - People in less deprived areas tend to first have sex at a later age and are more likely to have children later in life than people in more deprived areas. People in more deprived areas are less likely to access abortion services than people in less deprived areas. New STI diagnosis rates are higher amongst those living in more deprived areas.
- **Disability** – People with learning disabilities often face challenges due to concerns about vulnerability, consent, and potential exploitation. A study shows that by age 19/20, they are as likely as their peers to have had sexual intercourse, but more likely to practice unsafe sex. Young women in this group have a higher likelihood of pregnancy or motherhood.
- **Sexual orientation** – MSM are more likely to be diagnosed with bacterial STIs than other men, some MSM do not identify as gay or bisexual, especially in societies where being gay is considered taboo. Lesbian, bisexual, and other women who have sex with women (LBWSW) face sexual health inequalities, including higher STI rates and lower participation in screening and STI testing. Access to sexual health services can be hindered by heteronormative assumptions in sexual health, maternity, and infertility treatment services.
- **Gender identity** - Trans and non-binary people report that the provision of good sexual and reproductive health information is poor, with these groups reporting that information is skewed towards those identifying as the same gender as birth and heteronormative assumptions.

# South Asian communities

In Blackburn with Darwen, 35.7% of the population identify as Asian/Asian British. In developing this strategy, our stakeholders and communities have highlighted the need to recognise and acknowledge the distinct challenges faced by South Asian communities.

Research highlights that South Asian communities face several barriers to healthcare access, including: low socioeconomic status, racial and cultural discrimination, geography, language barriers, and traditional hierarchies within families.

These barriers can obstruct access to sexual health information and services, leading to a lack of knowledge and awareness about sexual health issues and available services. Conservative attitudes towards sex and sexuality can be prevalent in some South Asian communities, leading to stigma and shame around discussing sexual health issues openly. This can further hinder access to sexual health information and services. Arranged marriages, which are common in some South Asian cultures, can limit discussions and considerations regarding sexual health and compatibility.

Strict and traditional gender roles can impact the ability of individuals, particularly women, to access sexual health resources and make autonomous decisions regarding their sexual health.

Lack of culturally appropriate sexual health education can also contribute to a lack of knowledge and awareness about sexual health issues and available services. Economic, legal, and cultural barriers can limit access to sexual health services, while strong religious beliefs can influence perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours related to sexuality and sexual health, potentially limiting discussions and access to services.

To improve sexual health in Blackburn with Darwen it's crucial to create a diverse and culturally aware approach. This approach should include focused interventions, outreach that understands cultural nuances, and provision of resources aimed at diverse and marginalised communities.





# Gender and sexuality

Within this strategy and across our sexual health services, we recognise and promote an approach that embraces and celebrates diversity within gender and sexuality.

Through this strategy and action plan we aim to champion inclusivity and destigmatise conversations around gender and sexuality, and provide accessible and affirming sexual health for all individuals in our borough.

Through the implementation of this strategy and action plan we will:

## **Inclusive Research:**

- Recognise the unique intersections of gender, sexuality, race and ensure that our approach recognises the unique challenges experienced by individuals.

## **Sexual Orientation:**

- Recognise and affirm a range of sexual orientations, including but not limited to heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, and asexual identities.

## **Inclusive Sexual Health**

- Provide culturally competent and affirming sexual health services for individuals across the gender and sexuality spectrum.

## **Relationships and Sex Health Education**

- Promote inclusive sexual health education in schools, covering diversity in gender, sexuality and relationship dynamics.
- Ensure educational programs increase understanding of diverse sexual orientations and reduce stereotypes and prejudices.

## **Gender Inclusivity:**

- Acknowledge that gender exists on a spectrum beyond the binary of male and female, including non-binary, genderqueer, and genderfluid identities.
- Use inclusive language that respects individuals' chosen pronouns and gender identities to create a safe and supportive environment.



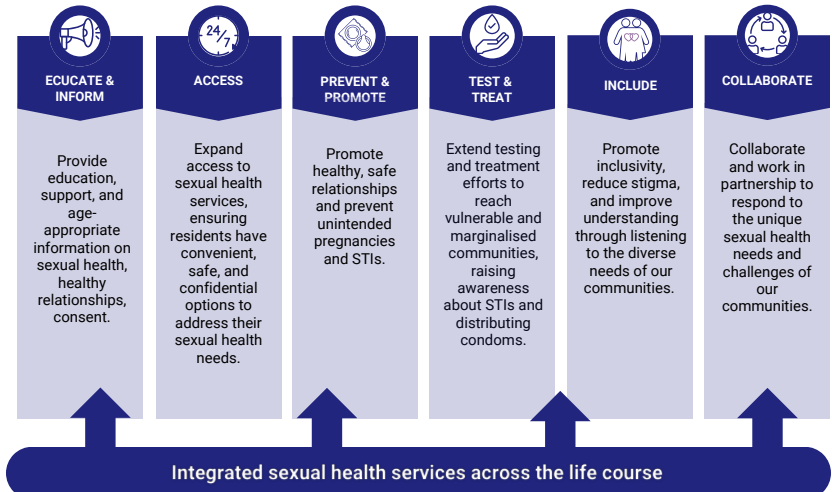
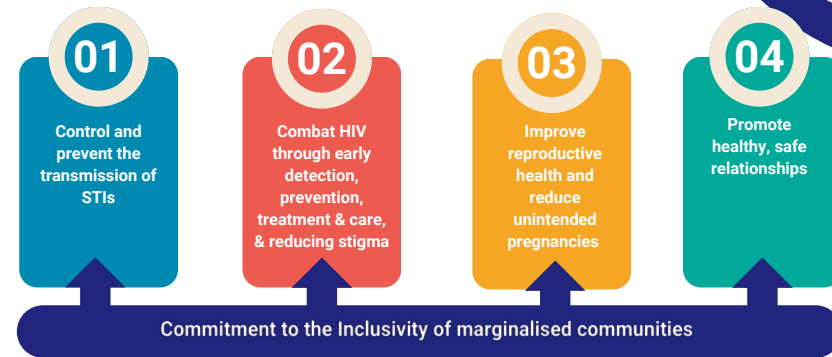
# A commitment to inclusivity



Throughout our stakeholder engagement events, a reoccurring theme has emerged regarding the inclusivity of diverse and underrepresented communities in sexual health. Stakeholders and community members have continuously identified the unique needs and multi layered challenges faced by our communities in Blackburn with Darwen. We recognise that our journey towards sexual health equality is ongoing, and we are committed to continuous improvement, particularly in our efforts in reaching out to communities and individuals who have historically been hindered from accessing sexual health services.

We understand the importance of creating diverse, culturally aware approaches. These should include targeted interventions and outreach that account for cultural nuances, alongside the provision of tailored resources and information. Our goal is to reduce stigma, raise awareness, and increase access to sexual health services for people who South Asian, LGBTQ+ as well as neurodiverse and disabled communities, contributing to overall community health and resilience in Blackburn with Darwen.

Our commitment to the inclusivity of marginalised communities serves as the golden thread woven throughout the priorities identified in this strategy. We strive to ensure all residents have equal access to sexual health services throughout their life and that they can enjoy a life of sexual health, free from prejudice or bias.



Our vision is that all our residents have equal access to sexual health services throughout their life and they can enjoy a life of sexual health, free from prejudice or bias.

**Our Vision**

# Our Sexual Health

## Priorities



EDUCATE & INFORM



ACCESS



PREVENT & PROMOTE



TEST & TREAT



INCLUDE



COLLABORATE

# Integrated sexual health



## Integrated sexual health

Our sexual health services provide a prevention-focused, integrated clinical and digital approach across the life course.

Clinical services are available to anyone living in Blackburn with Darwen and include:

- STI testing and treatment
- Contraception (including long-acting methods and emergency contraception)
- Pregnancy testing and help with pregnancy choices
- HIV support
- Information and advice around all aspects of sexual health and wellbeing
- Cervical screening
- Psychosexual counselling

## Specialist advice and support on HIV

- Counselling services
- Befriending services
- Complementary therapies
- Group and peer support

Alongside our clinical provision, education and outreach play a crucial role in our offer and by providing information about safe practices, prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and healthy relationships we aim to empower individuals to make informed choices about their sexual health.

## Digital sexual health

Residents also have the convenience of accessing comprehensive digital sexual health services without the necessity of a clinic visit or a direct consultation with a healthcare practitioner through the Those over 16 can access:

- Postal STI tests for chlamydia, gonorrhoea, HIV, and syphilis are available, ensuring wider accessibility and privacy
- Provisions for testing and treatment are available for genital warts and herpes, facilitating comprehensive care
- Access to repeat and emergency contraception is facilitated, offering additional support and peace of mind

# Current Response



## Awareness, Education & Campaigns

3114 people supported via Education and Outreach.

1782 young people received RSHE from 92 sessions of RHSE delivered.

1785 people received information, training or support on HIV

## Testing and Treatment

6546 attendances at Brook.

54 patients supported through psychosexual counselling.

11082 STIs screens carried out.

5101 screens via clinical / 5981 screens via digital services

## Prevention & Contraception

5616 sexual health kits distributed

2861 people accessed contraception

Emergency Hormonal Contraception (EHC) issued 2069 times through the community pharmacy scheme

410 safer sex packs distributed & 266 brief interventions & significant contacts via outreach in public sex environments

48 people accessed PrEP from sexual health services.

111 photo consultations

1621 HIV tests carried out / 876 HIV tests Brook / 745 HIV tests carried out through digital services.

# Sexual health data



The proportion of 15-24 year olds tested for chlamydia is significantly worse than the national rate and has been for many years.



HIV testing coverage is declining, with less than 1/3 of eligible individuals getting tested, significantly lower than the national average of nearly 46%



The rate of LARC prescribed per 1,000 was 23.8 in 2020, lower than the rate of 34.6 per 1,000 in England.



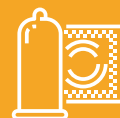
In 2021, there were 630 abortions of those aged 15-44, meaning the rate of abortion was above the national average.



The STI testing rate of those under 25 in the borough has been significantly worse than the national average.



The percentage of late-stage HIV diagnoses among individuals first diagnosed in the UK was 44.4%, similar to the 43.4% rate in England.



In 2021 there were 630 abortions in the borough. The total abortion rate per 1,000 aged 15 to 44 was higher than the rate in England.



There were 521 sexual offences recorded 2022-2023: 3.36 sexual offences per 1000



Gonorrhoea diagnoses in 2021 were 115th highest out of 150. The rate per 100,000 was 36.7, better than the rate of 90.3 in England



Number of adults living with diagnosed HIV in Blackburn with Darwen in 2021 : 112



The borough had the 2nd highest rate of under 18s births in the North West in 2021.



2.1% of people in the borough (c.2,500) aged 16+ identified as LGB (lower than the national figure).

# Sexual health priorities



The four sexual health priorities in this strategy have been identified from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) Sexual and Reproductive Health Profiles. Alongside these priorities we have identified additional cross cutting themes to reach out to engage with diverse and under-represented communities in our borough.

By changing how and where we promote and deliver our services, as well as hearing the voices of these who have traditionally been marginalised, we aim to create sexual health strategy for Blackburn with Darwen that truly reflects the needs of our communities.

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**Commitment to the inclusivity of marginalised communities**

# Control and prevent the transmission of STIs

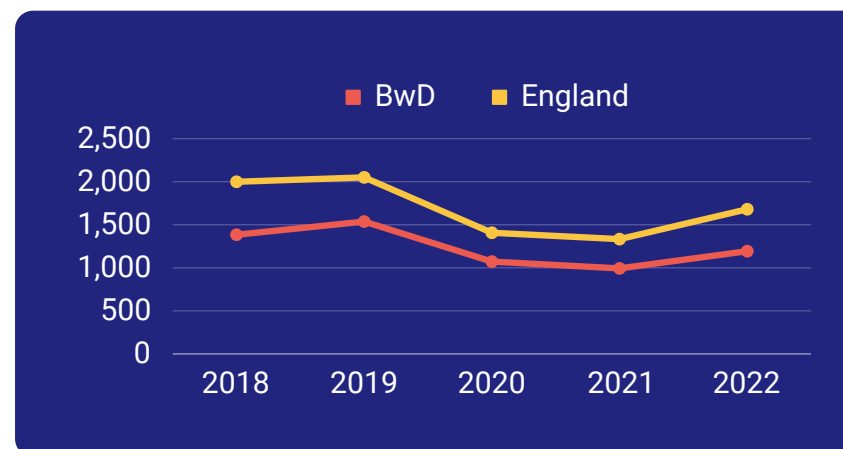
Sexually transmitted infections are spread through sexual contact, including vaginal, anal, and oral sex. They can be caused by bacteria, viruses, parasites, and fungi. If left untreated STIs can have serious consequences including infertility, chronic pain, and even death.

Preventing the spread of STIs through universal access to free condoms, promoting and improving STI testing and increasing the uptake of vaccinations e.g. HPV, with young people or HEP A/B, MPOX with MSM is important for both individual and public health. By taking steps to prevent the spread of these infections, we can protect ourselves and our communities from the potential consequences of these infections.

## What is the current data telling us?

- Despite an uptake in 2022, diagnostic rates for new STIs have fallen since 2016. With the borough having the fifth lowest rate amongst authorities in the North West in 2022.
- In 2022, from 3,794 tests for STI's (excluding chlamydia under 25) amongst borough residents, 284 tests came back positive (7.5%). Similar to the national rate (7.6%).
- Since 2020, the proportion of 15-24 year old's screened in the borough has increased but remains much lower than national and regional figures.

- Since 2018, there have been between 200-300 diagnoses of chlamydia among 15 to 24 year olds per year within sexual health services (SHS), with the current rate of detection amongst the lowest amongst authorities in the North West.



Chlamydia detection rate per 100,000 aged 15-24

- The rank for Gonorrhoea diagnoses (which can be used as an indicator of local burden of STIs in general) in Blackburn with Darwen was 115th highest (out of 150 UTLAs/UAs) in 2021. The rate per 100,000 was 36.7, better than the rate of 90.3 in England



# Combat HIV through early detection, prevention, treatment & care, & reducing stigma

02

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is transmitted through contact with certain body fluids, blood, semen, vaginal fluids, rectal fluids, and breast milk.

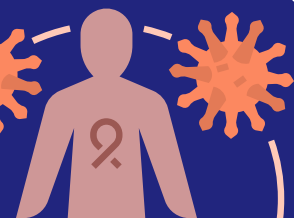
HIV is a virus that attacks the immune system, specifically the CD4 cells, (T cells) which aid the immune system in fighting off infections. If not treated, HIV can lead to AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). Unlike some other viruses, the human body cannot get rid of HIV, so once someone has HIV, they have it for life. Over time, HIV can destroy so many T cells that the body can't fight off infections and disease.

Preventive measures such as regular HIV testing, condom use, access to PrEP and PEP alongside prompt initiation of anti-retroviral treatment and retention in care is critical for prevention and to ensure that individuals with HIV are able to live long, healthy lives.

Due to medical advancements in HIV, undetectable HIV means it is now untransmittable (U=U), and if a person with HIV has an undetectable viral load due to effective treatment, they cannot pass on the virus to their sexual partners.

## What is the current data telling us?

- In 2022, 3 people in Blackburn with Darwen were diagnosed with HIV.
- In 2022, 114 people in the borough were diagnosed and living with HIV with 95 aged from 15 to 59.
- In 2022, 735 people (29.4% of those eligible) took a HIV test in sexual health services.
- Testing coverage amongst men (55.8%) is worse than the national figure (65.1%). Rates are also significantly lower amongst women with only 18% eligible testing compared to 38.5% nationally.
- Testing coverage (83%) and repeat testing (43.6%) amongst MSM are around the national average.
- In 2022, the proportion of all HIV negative individuals accessing SHS with PrEP need was 3.4%, compared to 9.7% nationally.
- Across 2020-22, the proportion of people newly diagnosed with HIV who start ART within 91 days of their diagnosis was 100% compared to 85.4% nationally.



# Improve reproductive health & reduce unintended pregnancies

Good quality sex education and access to contraception and sexual health services can empower individuals to plan their futures and improve their wellbeing.

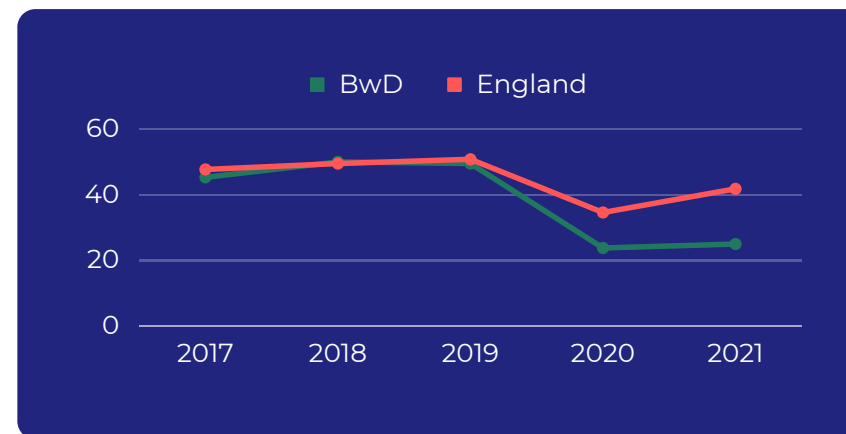
Preventing unintended pregnancies plays a crucial role in reducing maternal and infant mortality rates, as well as improving the overall health outcomes for mother, parent and child.

By focusing on the social, economic, and health consequences of unintended pregnancies and prioritising reproductive health, we can improve outcomes and promote the well-being of individuals, families, and our communities in Blackburn with Darwen.

## What is the current data telling us?

- There were 42 pregnancies amongst under 18's, (with 4 amongst under 16's specifically) a rate of 12.6 per 1,000 in 2021, not dissimilar from the national figure (13.1 per 1,000).
- The mean age of mothers has slightly increased from 29.3 in 2019 to 29.6 in 2021. Lower than the national average of 30.9.

- NICE advises that LARC methods are highly effective as they do not rely on daily compliance and are more cost-effective than condoms/ the pill. Rates of prescribed LARC (25 per 1,000) and GP-prescribed (17.7 per 1,000) and SHS (7.2 per 1,000) LARC specifically have fallen since the COVID pandemic.



Total prescribed LARC (excluding injections) rate per 1,000, 15-44, 2017 to 2021

- In 2021, there were 630 abortions of those aged 15-44 living in the borough, meaning the rate of abortion was above the national average. However, the current abortion rate for under 18s is the second lowest in the North West.
- Amongst under-25s, in 2021, 34.2% of abortions involved individuals who had an abortion previously.

# Promote healthy, safe relationships

Promoting healthy relationships across the life course is a priority in this sexual health strategy as it lays the foundation for a safe, fulfilling, and respectful relationships for individuals. Healthy relationships encompass not only physical aspects but also emotional, psychological, and social aspects of intimacy.

Addressing the significance of consent, gender equality, and shared responsibility in intimate partnerships helps prevent the continuation of harmful behaviours and the spread of sexually transmitted infections.

Healthy relationships contribute to overall mental well-being, boosting self-esteem and reducing the risk of mental health issues related to sexuality. By prioritising healthy relationships within this sexual health strategy, we aim to promote and respect diversity and difference across our communities so each individual feels and safe and welcomed in our borough.

## What is the current data telling us?

- Hospital admissions for violence (including sexual violence) are in the lowest percentile in England with 83.8 per 100,000.
- In terms of the rate of sexual offences - the borough's rate (3.4 per 1,000) is slightly higher than England (3.2 per 1,000) in the 2021/22 period.
- There were 42 pregnancies amongst under-18's, (with 4 amongst under-16's specifically) This equates to a rate of 12.6 per 1,000 in 2021, not dissimilar from the national figure (13.1 per 1,000).
- The mean age of mothers has slightly increased from 29.3 in 2019 to 29.6 in 2021. Lower than the national average of 30.9.
- The 2021 BWD School Health Needs Assessment (SHNA) surveyed 463 young people in year 9, 24% of young people did not know where to go for advice and information about relationships and sexual health.



# Recommendations & Governance



EDUCATE & INFORM



ACCESS



PREVENT & PROMOTE



TEST & TREAT



INCLUDE



COLLABORATE

# Working towards our vision

To achieve our vision, we will ensure that our integrated offer is implemented across the life course and we will work in partnership to impact on the sexual health priorities identified in this strategy.

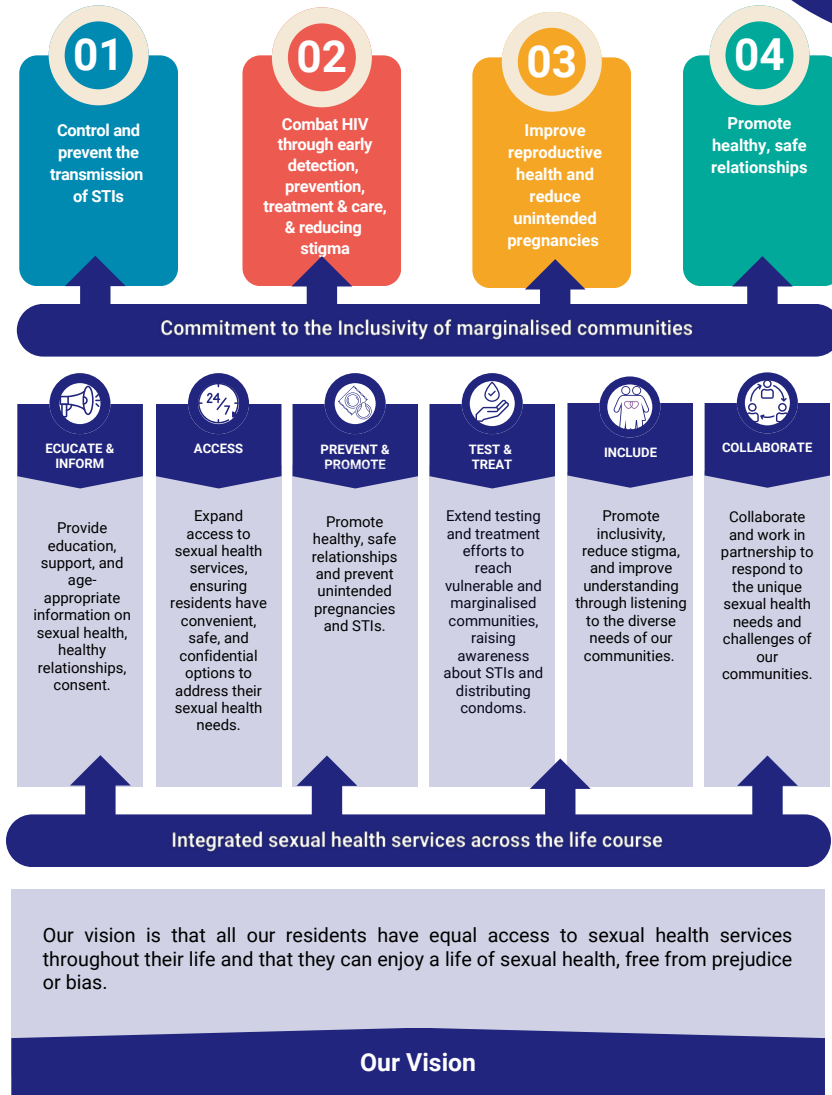
Each priority will be underpinned by a series of universal objectives

- Educate and Inform
- Increase Access
- Prevent and Promote
- Test and Treat
- Include
- Collaborate

Through each priority and objective we will reinforce our commitment to the inclusivity of marginalised communities,

We will establish a sexual health network and will continuously engage with stakeholders to co-create action plans which will be reviewed on an annual basis.

As part of the sexual health network will train and develop our workforce, whilst sharing resources, research and best practice across sexual health.



# Building upon the national framework

In developing this strategy we recognise the changes that have occurred since the development of the National Framework in 2013 and over the course of this strategy we will aim to build upon those foundations by:

- Prevention and Treatment of HIV:** Control and prevent the transmission of HIV through reducing barriers to PrEP, increasing and continuing to promote condom use and regular HIV testing.
- Improve Outcomes:** Ensure that people living with HIV have efficient and continuous access to effective treatment
- Prevention and Treatment of STIs:** Controlling and preventing the transmission of STIs through increasing the uptake of vaccinations e.g. HPV vaccines, Hep A/B ,gonorrhoea and promoting regular testing- including self testing alongside the distribution of condoms with high risk communities.
- Improve Women’s Health:** Ensuring that residents have ease of access to all methods of contraception including through new services including Women’s Health Hubs and the NHS National Pharmacy Contraception Service
- Digital Integration:** Provide innovative digital solutions for sexual health alongside traditional sexual health services.
- Comprehensive Education:** Promote high quality, age appropriate Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RHSE).
- Stigma Reduction:** Encourage open discussion and regular health checks to reduce the stigma around sexual and reproductive health.
- Promote Inclusivity:** Acknowledge and address the needs of all genders, sexual orientations, and identities, ensuring services are sensitive and appropriate for a diverse population.
- Voices of Communities with Lived Experience:** Create opportunities to learn from residents to improve our sexual health offer.



# Recommendations: Years 1-2



## EDUCATE & INFORM

- Advocate for policies and initiatives that support RSHE.
- Workforce training to improve knowledge of PrEP.
- Deliver targeted training to GPs on HIV interactions and clinical conditions,



## ACCESS

- Increase awareness of sexual health services. .
- Embed Point of Care Testing (POCT) and satellite services sites into services working with vulnerable communities.
- Increase places where residents access SHS



## PREVENT & PROMOTE

- Improve uptake of vaccination programmes e.g. HPV with adolescents & MPOX / Hep A/ B vaccine with GBMSM
- Promote the use of PrEP and (PEP)



## TEST & TREAT

- Expand mobile outreach and testing services with a focus on high risk and vulnerable groups
- Offer HIV testing as part of routine care



## INCLUDE

- Listen to the voices of communities
- Map and understand the needs of communities
- Reach out and improve our offer for diverse communities
- Remove barriers to access, information and support



## COLLABORATE

- Establish a sexual health alliance and promote intersectoral collaboration across health, education, voluntary sector services
- Collaborate to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for this strategy

These initial actions have been identified through stakeholder engagement undertaken as part of this strategy development process.

# Governance



The governance of this strategy is a critical element to ensure that these sexual health priorities are achieved and are impactful to the individuals and communities of Blackburn with Darwen.

## Sexual Health Services

The Blackburn with Darwen Public Health team holds responsibility for commissioning of integrated sexual health services. Representatives from the Public Health team alongside the Strategic Commissioning Team meet with commissioned services on a quarterly basis to review contract performance and agree any changes in services required. Any issues highlighted through these meetings are flagged and escalated to the Public Health Senior Leadership Team for further action where necessary. Through these contract meetings, and through any future commissioning exercises, we will work closely to ensure that commissioned services are fully aligned to support the successful delivery of this strategy.

## Health and Wellbeing Board

Development and delivery of the Sexual Health Strategy forms part of the Live Well priorities identified within the Blackburn with Darwen Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The Blackburn with Darwen Health and Wellbeing Board is ultimately responsible for delivery of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and will therefore receive an annual (or upon request) high level update on performance against delivery of this strategy.





# References &

# Acknowledgements



EDUCATE & INFORM



ACCESS



PREVENT & PROMOTE



TEST & TREAT



INCLUDE



COLLABORATE

# Acknowledgements



The development of this strategy has been supported with the engagement of over one hundred and fifty stakeholders, either through digital surveys, events or community focus groups. The ideas, expertise and lived experiences of our communities have increased awareness of the diverse needs and challenges relating to sexual health in Blackburn with Darwen. All stakeholders have played a pivotal role in shaping a strategy that is inclusive, evidence-based, and responsive to the priorities and aspirations of our communities in Blackburn with Darwen.

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Thank you all of the stakeholders who have contributed to development of this strategy.

# References

This strategy has been developed upon the following national and local guidance, statistics and reports and should be read in with the [Blackburn with Darwen Sexual Health Joint Needs Assessment](#)

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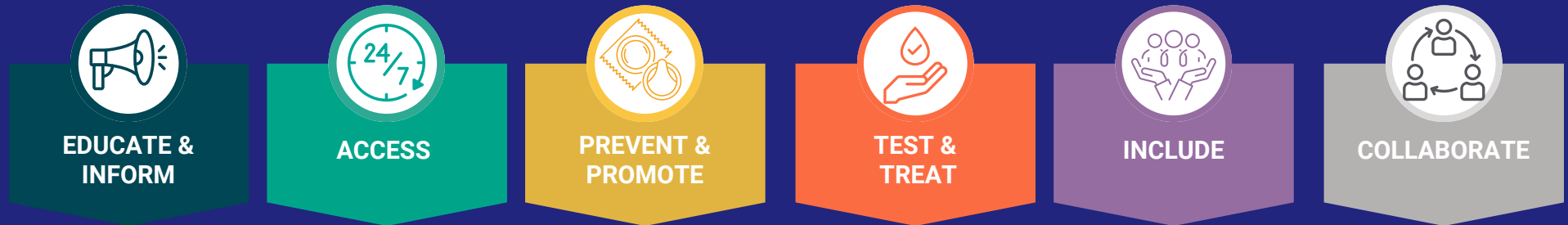
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# Glossary



- BBV - Blood Borne Virus
- BME - Black Minority Ethnic communities
- BWD - Blackburn with Darwen
- CSE - Child Sexual Exploitation
- EHC - Emergency Hormonal Contraception
- FSRH - Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare
- HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus
- HMO - House in Multiple Occupation
- ISHS- Integrated Sexual Health Service
- IUD - Intrauterine Device
- IUS - Intrauterine System
- GBMSM - Gay and Bisexual Men and Men who have with Men
- JSNA - Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- LARC - Long Acting Reversible contraception
- LGBTQ+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, /Queer/Questioning,
- MECC – Making Every Contact Count
- MSM – Men who have Sex with Men
- NCSP – National Chlamydia Screening Programme
- NHSE – NHS England
- NICE - National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
- PEP - Post exposure Prophylaxis following sexual exposure
- PReP - Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis
- PHE - Public Health England
- POP - Progestogen-Only Pill
- POCT - Point of Care Test
- PrEP - Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis
- RSE - Relationships and Sex Education
- SARC - Sexual Assault Referral Centre
- SHS - Sexual Health Services
- SHNA - Sexual Health Needs Assessment
- SRH - Sexual and Reproductive Health
- STI - Sexually Transmitted Infection
- ToP - Termination of Pregnancy
- WSW- Women who have Sex with Women



## **Blackburn with Darwen Sexual Health Strategy:**

**These are relevant responses collated through the digital survey which led to the priorities and objectives with in this strategy.**

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**Please comment on any of the challenges or barriers relating to sexual health and the people that you support.**

Responses :

- Access to services in their local area.
- Accessibility for YPs unsure other than BROOK where YP can go for advice (other than if they become open to us)
- I have found that the young people i have worked with in the past regarding this have engaged positively.
- Transgender.
- I think that we work really closely with sexual health services and treatment is really accessible especially with the SH 24 service.
- Lack of understanding about consent Limited understanding about child sexual exploitation and the grooming process Limited understanding of children's rights The need to understand Domestic Abuse and inappropriate and controlling behaviour and when a relationship is toxic and damaging
- Low self-esteem / poor mental health as a result of experiences of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. Asylum seekers and refugees may in addition experience language barriers and, if in a hostel, may be unable to come out as LGBTQ+ for fear of physical attacks and verbal abuse form their own fellow nationals there.
- Reluctance of partners to share relevant information. Need more joined up working and partner buy in especially from the police. Need a mechanism for any incidents in the community/on outreach to be fed back to relevant agencies.
- Lack of awareness, understanding and sexual health often being seen as taboo
- Stigma around going to clinics such as Brook. Young people take on board informal education in relation to sexual health and healthy relationships but still feel there is a stigma around walking into clinics/ nervous about confidentiality etc
- Our remit is not specifically limited to sexual health per se but whenever we have referred/signposted etc there have been no issues.
- Stigma
- Some young people as reluctant to seek help or testing.
- None
- Attitudes of adults/parents/carer of young people who are SEN/Learning Disabilities/Difficulties as sometimes these y.p needs/development are not considered.
- Embarrassment amongst young people in accessing sexual health services; lack of awareness of such services and how to access them; school curriculum being outdated in some ways and needing revising e.g. inclusive of more topics relating to sexual health and behaviours.
- Education on sexual health and where to signpost people to

- LGBT
- Up to date information. Where to access this in order to share accordingly.
- Accessing same day appointments in services such as Brook
- Access to services - knowledge of what is available, confidence to access independently etc. Education - e.g. online, apps, sharing photographs etc. Options available around contraception. Understanding of STIs and pregnancy etc. Healthy relationships, understanding coercive control etc.
- Sometimes it can be difficult to get a young person to engage and be open about their situation/experiences.
- Language is a barrier therefore educating patients can be misinterpreted even though they say they have understood. Fitting LARC needs to be within a cycle and that can put pressure on the practice for future bookings due to illness or annual leave taken last minute which can upset the patient.
- LGBT inclusion
- N/A
- Getting a same day apt at Brook or GP for services such as screening, contraception, emergency contraception etc. When we are in a session and a YP says they want support for an issue they don't want to wait a week for an appointment.
- The great taboo and lack of knowledge of sexual health within the south Asian culture for many of the clients humraaz support acts as an extra barrier and challenge
- Y.P understanding of healthy relationships. Parental attitudes to y.p sexual health, particularly around SEN/Diverse y.p.
- Having access and information to local services
- N/A
- Lack of knowledge about services.
- Significant under education around sexual health and STIs
- Deprived area with a high rate of young pregnancies. As a practice in order for us to dedicate the time to women's health needs to be cost effect for the practice
- When providing outreach many service users and staff report that they don't need support, yet other residents will explain that they are sharing needles or having unprotected sex. It can be difficult to engage with these individuals due to lack of education and understanding. If the need isn't for sexual health we can often signpost and support into other services, so it can often be useful to engage.
- Pitching it at the right level for the groups and needs of the young people.
- N/A
- Workforce and capacity makes it difficult to sometimes connect with primary care. funding around the cost viability of providing larc is also sometimes a challenge
- N/A
- Barriers of child exploitation victims feeling unable to access support due to fear/shame/blame/reprisals from potential perpetrators.
- We are a diverse community. So language barriers will cause issues
- Engagement with Primary Care is declining. Disproportionately affected communities in relation to STIs. Women's Health development.
- The stigma around HIV
- The young people we work with often have difficulties in understanding the complex language used by services or accessing reading material provided by services/organisations
- Lack of resources from partner agencies to support our 7 day offer across 2 sites.



- Language
- None, we support all that need support.
- Are people confident to discuss sexual health?
- People who are not in care

#### What priorities or actions do you feel should be included in a sexual health strategy?

- Early intervention, localised delivery of services, education in schools and youth work settings.
- Accessibility for all YPs - for those that do not receive support in school
- I think a priority should be earlier intervention.
- Increased knowledge of sexual health and the signs of possible grooming/ safe relationships
- Engaging vulnerable women, trauma responsive
- Up to date legislation and understanding of this impact on daily work practice and community needs
- Government sexual abuse strategy (due to be updated in Spring/Summer 2023)
- Social media and the internet and Sextortion
- A digital and QR linked access to services and support - immediate crisis led and long term ongoing support and help
- Opportunity for Campaigns with specific focus to enable clarity and specific demographic targets.
- Sexual health needs of LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers.
- Sexual health needs of LGBTQ+ residents from minority ethnic communities who feel unable to speak to anyone from their own community about sexual health, including their GP."
- Accessible sexual health services for all, that meets their needs including at risk groups. Improved partnership working and information sharing. Need to understand what sex working looks like in the borough (on/off street) and need clear guidance around communication and reporting pathways.
- More inclusion for BME women - language issues and lack of understanding of sexual health
- For young people to have the right information to inform their choices.
- Services to be easy accessed.
- Importance of STI screening
- Contraception
- Healthy relationships
- RSE
- From our perspective, education around sex, consent, the law in the modern technology era (modern day pitfalls including sexting / voyeurism / revenge social media pictures etc)
- schools to be up to date and confident in terms of delivering the curriculum appropriately on issues around online safety and consent.
- age appropriate
- More awareness of the high levels of STI amongst y.p and adults, and ease of access to services.
- Education around age of consent and the Law, appropriate healthy relationships.
- Increased education in schools, improved access to sexual health services, harmful sexual behaviour, increased awareness & education amongst professionals.
- Safeguarding / education / signposting services

- Reduce STI's, reduce unintended pregnancies, Promote healthy sexual behaviour, reduce risky or preconceived sexual behaviour as seen on social media / TV as acceptable.
- Access to services in an emergency situation
- providing info to parents and children from a younger age including healthy relationships, porn awareness, exploitation etc.
- Education around Healthy relationships and same sex sex
- Understanding risks - e.g STI's and pregnancy
- Accessible services - including online support
- LGBT support and services
- Early education/intervention
- Provide GP practices with free condoms without the need to take any information from the patient i.e. postcode as previous scheme. This free service worked really well via our receptionists. At the same time provide leaflets on safe sex and transmissions explained.
- N/A
- Allowing engage team priority appts when required due to nature of CYP we support, i.e. accessing support when needed.
- Educating and raising awareness of sexual health amongst BME women
- High level of STI within BwD and access to testing treatment.
- Young person's voice paramount to be included, co-produced by young people.
- N/A
- Heavy emphasis on education aimed specifically at late teens/ early adults. Schools do not provide enough information about sexual health and the importance of using the correct protection. I believe this to be as bad if not worse in the LGBTQ+ community.
- To be aware who is providing service in the area
- Easy referral system to services
- Cost effectiveness to attract more people to get involved and make it worthwhile for practices"
- How young people should take care of themselves and about relationships.
- Include voice of young people
- Education around counselling in LARC to ensure footfall, alongside updates and fitter forums. ensure access to training and possible financial support for the training such as the OTA
- N/A
- Boys sexual education around sexual health and healthy relationships. I find girls seem to know about services and support, however many of the boys I have worked with are not. Sadly I have seen an increase in peer on peers cse. Particular in respect of sending/requesting indecent images.
- To target children who are NEET
- Accessibility and Inclusivity for all who need the services.
- better education around HIV and to break the stigma
- Language which is simple and easy to understand by all. Reading material which is dyslexia friendly
- 1.Young peoples lack of awareness on where and how to access support, 2.Young people not understanding the risk factors associated to poor sexual health 3.How to strengthen knowledge in marginalised communities and understanding the barriers to access "
- Healthy Relationships

- Consent
- All the above
- For sexual health questions to be ask in every assessment.
- More information to be out there about PREP.
- Access to care for people living with HIV stigma around sexual health including HIV

## EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



**REPORT OF:** Executive Member for Growth and Development

**LEAD OFFICERS:** Executive Member for Growth and Development

**DATE:** 11<sup>th</sup> January 2024

**PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:** Growth and Development

**WARD/S AFFECTED:** Darwen East;

**KEY DECISION:** Y

**SUBJECT: Acquisition of Land and Buildings at Holden Fold, Darwen for future Specialist Affordable Housing Provision**

### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report outlines the Council's plan to acquire an industrial site known as 'Beehive Mill' on Moor Lane in Darwen with a plan of the site attached at Appendix A.
- 1.2. The Beehive Mill site is adjacent to a planned new large housing site at Holden Fold acquired by Countryside Homes, which has secured planning approval for 477 family homes of mixed size and tenure.
- 1.3. The purpose of the Council acquisition is to plan and develop much needed specialist housing to complement the adjacent Holden Fold site and provide the Council with quality affordable specialist accommodation with nomination rights managed by a Registered Provider.
- 1.4. Development proposals for the Holden Fold housing site include comprehensive off-site highway upgrades, new access roads with new and enhanced public realm which will help upgrade and regenerate the local area.
- 1.5. The Beehive Mill buildings are currently occupied by a small furniture business. The owner of the property, 'Oriental Developments Ltd' has decided to sell the site with vacant possession. It will therefore be necessary for the current occupier and tenant of the property to relocate their business to a more appropriate and suitable industrial unit. To note, this is regardless of whether the Council purchases the site.
- 1.6. Following the proposed acquisition by the Council, the site will be immediately leased to Countryside Homes for use as a site compound for 4 years with an option to extend the lease by 1 additional year. As part of the proposed lease obligations, Countryside Homes will demolish the existing buildings and clear the site ready for future development. The obligation is for Countryside Homes to have completed this activity prior to the expiry of the lease and will therefore in effect hand back a cleared site to the Council ready for development.

- 1.7. Following the expiry of the lease, the site will be developed by the Council for specialist housing, details of the scheme and development details will be provided in a future report to the Executive Board.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Executive Board:

- 2.1 Notes the proposal for the Council to acquire the 'Beehive Mill' site, with full vacant possession, with the intention to develop the site for specialist affordable housing.
- 2.2 Grants approval for the purchase of the site for the agreed price outlined in the part 2 report.
- 2.3 Grants approval to use existing funds from the Section 106 Affordable Homes budget to purchase the site. Note the Council has adequate funds to support affordable housing provision.
- 2.4 Authorises the Growth Programme Director to finalise and complete the Heads of Terms for the purchase of the site.
- 2.5 Notes Countryside Homes interest to acquire a strip of land within the site as indicated on the plan attached at Appendix A (land shaded blue) with the purpose to facilitate the construction of two dwellings within their proposed development, subject to planning.
- 2.6 Grants approval for the Council to deal with Countryside Homes as Special Purchaser and agree terms for the disposal of the strip of land at the agreed price outlined in the part 2 report. The capital receipt is to be repaid to the Section 106 Affordable Homes budget.
- 2.7 Authorises the Growth Programme Director in consultation with the Executive Member for Growth and Development to finalise and complete the disposal terms of the strip of land to Countryside Homes.
- 2.8 Authorises the Growth Programme Director in consultation with the Executive Member for Growth and Development to finalise and complete terms to lease the site (Appendix A land edged red) to Countryside Homes for use as a temporary site compound for 4 years (plus 1 year option to extend) with a lease obligation to demolish the buildings and clear the site in lieu of an annual lease payment for the site.
- 2.9 Authorises the Deputy Director of Legal and Governance to complete the necessary legal formalities in the purchase of the site, disposal of the strip of land and granting of the lease.

## **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Council's Local Plan Part 2 (December 2015) identified and allocated the Holden Fold housing site of 8 Ha (45 acres) as suitable for residential development.
- 3.2 The Council subsequently adopted a Masterplan in 2021 which outlined a high-quality neighbourhood identifying spatial principles for land use, transport, design, and green infrastructure. Development proposals were required to include the provision of high-quality family homes (2, 3 and 4 bed dwellings) for market sale, affordable home ownership and affordable rent.
- 3.3 The Holden Fold housing site is part in Council ownership together with 5 additional private landowners. The Council's holding is circa 46% of the total site area and all landowners have

agreed to dispose of the site to Countryside Homes, who were selected by the landowners following a competitive tender process.

- 3.4 Countryside Homes secured planning consent in November 2023 under planning reference 10/23/0587 for the construction of 477 residential dwellings with public open space, landscaping, sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), demolition of existing stable buildings, new parking associated with the sports pavilion, additional parking off Knowle Lane, and vehicular access points off Holden Fold, Moor Lane, and Roman Road
- 3.5 The Beehive Mill is located on Moor Lane and directly adjacent to the Countryside Homes housing site at Holden Fold and occupies a prominent and visible location for the new housing development.
- 3.6 The Beehive Mill is in a state of disrepair and dilapidation and requires significant investment to comply with modern property and energy standards and as such the owner has decided to sell the property for the purposes of redevelopment given the planned investment in the Holden Fold housing site by Countryside Homes.
- 3.7 The owner of Beehive Mill site, 'Oriental Developments Ltd', intend to dispose of their property with the benefit of vacant possession and understand the owner has had discussions with the tenant and will provide an appropriate notice period for them to relocate their business.
- 3.8 Land registry records identify the site was acquired by 'Oriental Developments Ltd' in two parcels. The first parcel was acquired in 2007 and the second parcel was acquired in 2008.
- 3.9 The Council obtained an independent valuation of the site which is outlined in the part 2 report. The owner has had a separate valuation undertaken which is higher than the value provided by the Council's valuer and more in line with their historic acquisition cost.
- 3.10 The Council has agreed a purchase price with Oriental Developments Ltd which with the benefit of a forward sale of a strip of land to Countryside Homes will reduce the net acquisition price which is generally in accordance with the Council's valuation and therefore an acceptable purchase price.

#### **4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS**

- 4.1 The Council adopted a Masterplan in 2021 which outlined a high-quality neighbourhood identifying spatial principles for land use, transport, design, and green infrastructure. Development proposals were required to include the provision of high-quality family homes (2, 3 and 4 bed dwellings) for market sale, affordable home ownership and affordable rent.
- 4.2 Countryside Homes was selected as Preferred Developer for the site with the proposed housing development designed to regenerate the local area and bring inward investment to Darwen together with regenerating a former brownfield site which was formerly occupied by Darwen Moorland High School.
- 4.3 Leaving the mill site in situ with unknown future owners may compromise the new housing scheme and the Council's local strategic aims and 'Place Making' objectives set out in the adopted masterplan. Consequently, the Council believes the best option is for the Council to take a proactive step and secure the ownership of the site for future housing use removing risk of potential issues arising from conflicting adjacent uses.

- 4.4 Whilst there are a large number of new affordable homes planned for the Holden Fold site, there are no plans to develop specialist housing such as adapted homes for older people or for disabled young people and their families. The Council's Adults and Childrens teams have advised that there is currently a need for these types of homes and this need will increase over the next few years. To this end Council officers have considered potential housing solutions for the site and are supportive of securing the site for future specialist housing.
- 4.5 Purchasing the site now will ensure that the Holden Fold site is developed without any negative impact from the adjacent site and potentially undesirable future uses should the site be acquired by an unsympathetic developer or landlord.
- 4.6 Countryside Homes has agreed to lease the Beehive Mill site (Appendix A land edged red) from the Council for use as a site compound for their site works. On completion of the purchase the Council will grant an immediate and back-to-back lease to Countryside Homes with obligations to demolish the buildings which are unsuitable for use during the works. They may retain the newer building as part of their construction compound and will demolish all the buildings at the end of the lease period and hand back to the Council a cleared site ready for development. The proposed lease period will be for 4 years with an option to extend the lease for one more year.
- 4.7 Countryside Homes has agreed draft Heads of Terms to lease the site, carry out the required demolition works at their cost, to use the site as a site compound only and hand a cleared site back to the Council at the end of the agreed term.
- 4.8 Agreement has also been reached for Countryside to purchase a small strip of land from the acquired site (Appendix A land shaded blue) which will facilitate the construction of two homes and public open space as part of their planned scheme. Countryside Homes has agreed to purchase this small strip of land from the Council following the acquisition of the site by the Council. The capital receipt from this sale will be repaid back to the Section 106 Affordable Homes budget.
- 4.9 For the reasons outlined above it is recommended the Executive Board approves the purchase of the site from Oriental Developments Ltd to facilitate a positive outcome for the Council by securing a future specialist housing site for development.

## **5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The proposed residential development at Holden Fold will support the delivery of new homes in accordance with the Council's Local Plan and the Council's Corporate Plan.
- 5.2 Purchase of the site will provide much needed new specialist affordable homes to meet local need.
- 5.3 Proposals will also provide added benefits of aligning with the Council's vision to improve neighbourhoods, provide new homes, and improve health and wellbeing of residents.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1. The purchase of the site will be funded from the affordable homes Section 106 Affordable Homes budget which has adequate funds available. The capital receipt from the sale of the small strip of land to Countryside Homes will be repaid to the Section 106 Affordable Homes budget.

6.2. The purchase price is supported by independent valuations which have been used in agreeing the purchase price with the owner.

## 7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Council has agreed the purchase price following independent valuation advice and market comparable information.
- 7.2 The purchase price of the site has been considered in the context of providing a quantity of new specialist homes for affordable rent which would form a hub for future residents and service providers. Consideration was also given to the high level of funding typically required to carry out adaptations to existing properties for specialist use or cost to provide new specialist homes such as 'Lifetime Homes.'
- 7.3 The Council will grant Special Purchaser to Countryside Homes to finalise the agreement for the disposal of the strip of land to form part of their development.

## 8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Growth & Development team will lead the project to purchase the site and agree terms to lease the site to Countryside Homes.
- 8.2 It is proposed to use WHN Solicitors to complement in-house Council legal resources for the conveyance transaction and preparation of the lease documents. WHN Solicitors are a Blackburn based company and were employed by the landowners in preparing the legal documents for the Holden Fold site to Countryside Homes and therefore the proposal is based on ensuring continuity of the project documentation and familiarity.

## 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.

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.

## 10. CONSULTATIONS

The Council has completed a Housing and Economic Needs Assessment for the Borough as part of the Council's emerging Local Plan which recommends the Holden Fold site for residential allocation. As part of the Local Plan engagement plan the Council carried out extensive borough wide consultations in 2021 with residents, businesses, and key stakeholder groups.



## 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.

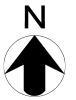
## 12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

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.

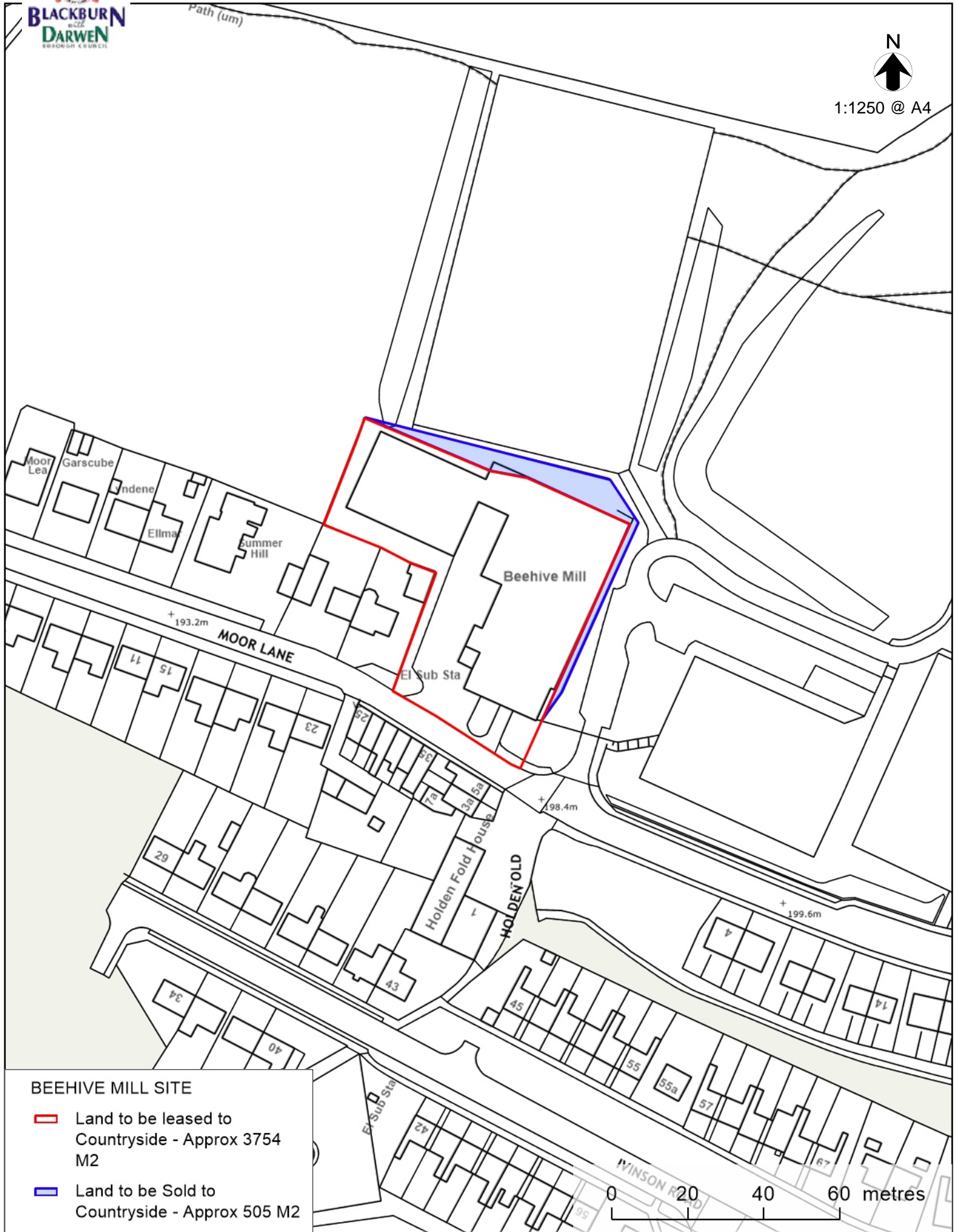
<b>VERSION:</b>	1.0
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	Subhan Ali, Growth and Development
<b>DATE:</b>	January 2024
<b>BACKGROUND PAPER:</b>	Appendix A - Plan of Beehive Mill site



BLACKBURN  
with  
DARWEN  
BOROUGH COUNCIL



1:1250 @ A4



BEEHIVE MILL SITE

- ▭ Land to be leased to Countryside - Approx 3754 M2
- ▭ Land to be Sold to Countryside - Approx 505 M2



**REPORT OF:** Executive Member for Finance and Governance

**LEAD OFFICER:** Strategic Director of Finance and Resources

**DATE:** 11<sup>th</sup> January 2024

**PORTFOLIOS AFFECTED:** All

**WARDS AFFECTED:** All

**KEY DECISION:** Y

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**TITLE OF REPORT:** Development of the General Fund Revenue Budget 2024/25 (including details of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2024/25)

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## 1. PURPOSE

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the development of the Council's budget for 2024/25. An update is also provided on the outcome of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement and what this means for the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that Executive Board:-

- a) note the outcome of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024/25 as set out in the report;
- b) note the response to the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024/25 as set out at **Appendix A**;
- c) note that further work is required to determine the estimate of Business Rates Retained for 2024/25 which will reflect the Council's local knowledge/circumstances and that this work has begun following the release of guidance from Government on this matter;
- d) acknowledge that the estimates of Council Tax income presented in the report are subject to decision by Finance Council on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2024 and are, therefore, indicative at this stage;
- e) note the updated Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/26 and this will be further updated once decisions on the Council's budget are taken at Finance Council on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2023.

### 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Annually, the Government provides local authorities with an indication of how much funding it will provide towards the cost of delivering services. Combined with the notional assessment of business rates amounts and Council Tax referendum limits, this is referred to as the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.
- 3.2 This report sets out details of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024/25 which was released on 18th December and includes the Council's response to the consultation on this matter. The report also describes what it may mean for the Council's medium term financial position reflecting both the details of the provisional Settlement for 2024/25 and Local Government Finance Policy Statement 2024/25 which the Government released in early December 2023.
- 3.3 The final Local Government Finance Settlement is not expected until early February 2024. In the meantime, work on the development of the Council's budget will continue and ultimately it is a matter for Finance Council on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2024 to determine both the budget (revenue and capital) and Council Tax for the next financial year.

### 4. RATIONALE

- 4.1 The development of the budget is a key element of the Council's financial governance processes. Now that the Government has provisionally provided details of the Council's funding for 2024/25, the Council will need to determine its budget for the year.
- 4.2 As the Executive Board may be aware, as part of the assessment of the Council's Value for Money arrangements, the Council's External Auditors will assess what arrangements the Council has in place to deliver a balanced budget including the adequacy of savings schemes. It is important that the Council has developed a robust and deliverable set of options for achieving a balanced and sustainable budget. This will also avoid any adverse commentary in the Auditor's report on Value for Money.

### 5. KEY ISSUES

#### Autumn Statement

- 5.1 The last update on the development of the Council's Budget for 2024/25 (and the Medium Term Financial Plan) was provided to the Executive Board in June 2023. This provided details of the Spring Statement 2023 which, for Local Government, provided no new funding announcements of substance. Indeed, subsequent analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) indicated that, even with reasonably strong economic growth (something which is not currently being achieved), Government Departments with unprotected budgets (including Further Education, HM Courts Services, HM Revenues and Customers **and Local Government**) would be subject to a real terms funding reduction over the period 2024/25 to 2027/28 of 3.2%.
- 5.2 Towards the end of November 2023, the Government published its Autumn Statement. The Statement contained little information on the finances for Local Government, in essence confirming previous funding allocations (aside from additional funding to provide business rate reliefs).

## Local Government Finance Policy Statement 2024/25

- 5.3 As in 2023/24, as part of the Autumn Statement announcement, the Government did commit to provided Local Authorities with an updated Local Government Finance Policy Statement. The Policy Statement was released on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023 and provided headline details of funding for Local Government, all of which has subsequently been confirmed in the provisional Settlement.
- 5.4 Unlike in 2023/24, the Policy Statement only provided headlines for 2024/25. As had become the norm in recent years, there was no indication of likely levels of funding beyond the next financial year.

## Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement

- 5.5 Details of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024/25 were announced on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023. Releasing the provisional Settlement signals the opening of a period of consultation by the Government on the details of the Settlement for which the deadline for responses is 15<sup>th</sup> January 2024. Thereafter, the Government normally publishes the final Settlement towards the end of January/early February.
- 5.6 The provisional Settlement represents the Government's view of the Council's funding position for 2024/25. In particular, the Settlement provides the Government's assessment of the Council's Core Spending Power comprising funding such as Business Rates retained, Revenue Support Grant, Council Tax and other grants payable to the Council (examples include the Social Care Grant and the Improved Better Care Fund).
- 5.7 For both the Revenue Support Grant and other grants payable to the Council, the amounts given in the provisional Settlement reflect the actual grants that will be paid to the Council. The amount of Business Rates Retained and Council Tax reflect the Government's assessment of what the Council might raise; in both cases, the actual amounts will be subject to determination by the Council according to local assessment and/or decision making (both of which will be influenced by local factors).
- 5.8 A response to the consultation on the Provisional Settlement to be submitted to the Government as required and is provided at **Appendix A** to this report.

### *Change in Core Spending Power*

- 5.9 Core Spending Power (CSP) is a measure used by the Government to set out the resources available to a Council to fund service delivery. It combines actual cash grants payable to Councils with estimates of Business Rates and Council Tax receipts that a local authority might receive based on Government assumptions. CSP is used by the Government to make comparisons of the resources available to different Councils. For the reasons set out below, it is not necessarily the actual funding a Council will receive to fund service delivery.
- 5.10 On the basis of the provisional Settlement, the Council's CSP for 2024/25 will increase by 6.9% when compared to CSP in 2023/24 and includes an assumption by Government that Councils will increase their Council Tax by the maximum allowable under the Council Tax Referendum Principles. This is in comparison to the average CSP for all Councils in England of 6.5% (meaning the Council has the 24<sup>th</sup> highest increase in CSP out of 350 Local Authorities (including Fire Authorities)).

*Provisional Settlement compared to Medium Term Financial Plan*

- 5.11 The year-on-year change in the CSP provides one measure of the change in the Council's funding position. Of more importance is how the provisional Settlement compares to what the Council has been assuming in its Medium Term Financial Plan.
- 5.12 Table 1 below provides a summary of the Council's funding position as set in the provisional Settlement compared to the position included in the Council's developing Medium Term Financial Plan for 2024/27. The table shows the calculation of the Baseline Funding Assessment, the Settlement Funding Assessment and the Core Spending Power for the Council:-

**Table 1: Provisional Settlement 2024/25 (compared to MTFP as at October 2023)**

	MTFP *2 2024/25 £000	Provisional Settlement 2024/25 £000	Variance £000	Variance %
Business Rates Retained (IABR*1) *3	20,190	21,725	1,535	7.6
Business Rates Top Up	25,619	26,289	670	2.6
<b>Baseline Funding Assessment</b>	<b>45,809</b>	<b>48,014</b>	<b>2,205</b>	<b>4.8</b>
Revenue Support Grant	15,695	16,734	1,039	6.6
<b>Settlement Funding Assessment</b>	<b>61,504</b>	<b>64,748</b>	<b>3,244</b>	<b>5.3</b>
Under-indexing Business Rates *3	13,225	9,593	(3,632)	(27.5)
Improved Better Care Fund	8,349	8,349	-	0.0
Social Care Grant	8,813	8,813	-	0.0
Independent Living Fund	386	386	-	0.0
Equalisation of 2% ASC Precept	995	1,990	995	100.0
Additional Adult Social Care Funding	3,774	5,469	1,695	44.9
Market Sustainability and Fair Funding	1,790	3,344	1,554	86.8
Discharge Funding	1,171	1,951	780	66.6
New Homes Bonus	-	830	830	100.0
Services Grant	1,802	284	(1,518)	(84.2)
Grants Rolled into Settlement	-	-	-	-
<b>Total Government Funding</b>	<b>101,809</b>	<b>105,757</b>	<b>3,948</b>	<b>3.9</b>
Council Tax (excl Parish Precepts)	68,720	68,627	(93)	(0.1)
<b>Core Spending Power</b>	<b>170,529</b>	<b>174,384</b>	<b>3,855</b>	<b>2.3</b>

\*1 – Individual Authority Business Rates Assessment

\*2 – As per Medium Term Financial Plan reported to Finance Council in Oct 2023.

- 5.13 For the purposes of assessing net betterment in grant in the Provisional Settlement compared to the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan, both the Business Rates Retained and Under-Indexing Business Rates variations can be ignored at this stage. As indicated below, the amounts provided in the Provisional Settlement are the Government's notional estimates of these amounts and the Council will undertake in the next few weeks to determine its own estimates based on local circumstances.
- 5.14 Excluding these variations, the net change in cash grants payable in Government Funding to the Council is £6.045m of which £5.024m is additional Social Care-related grants. More details of the provisional Settlement are provided below.

### *Business Rates Retained*

- 5.15 At this stage, the estimate of Business Rates Retained is the Government's assessment of the Council's amount of business rates the Council will retain from the net collectable Business Rates generated in the Borough (based on a 49% share, with the balance shared between the Lancashire Fire Authority (1%) and the Government (50%)). This is based on their knowledge of the Business Rates taxbase, exemptions and reliefs.
- 5.16 Work on the Council's own assessment of the estimate of Business Rates Retained will begin in the next fortnight. This will be based on the Council's knowledge of the expected growth/decline in the taxbase, exemptions, reliefs and provision for bad debts and appeals. Ordinarily, this work will conclude during late January 2024. ***The Business Rates Retained estimate for 2024/25 may therefore change.***

### *Business Rates Top Up*

- 5.17 In simple terms, the Business Rates Top-Up is the amount payable to the Council to reflect the difference in the Council's Baseline Funding Assessment (the assessment of funding needed to deliver services (last undertaken in 2013/14)) and its ability to raise income from Business Rates (the Individual Authority Business Rates Assessment). ***The Business Rates Top-Up is a cash amount and is unlikely to change between the provisional and final Settlement.***

### *Revenue Support Grant*

- 5.18 Revenue Support Grant is a general cash grant payable to the Council. ***This is unlikely to change between provisional and final settlement.*** Revenue Support Grant for 2024/25 has increased by £1.039m to £16.734m when compared to 2023/24. This reflects an uplift in the grant by the CPI rate of inflation (6.6%);

### *Other Grants*

- 5.19 As indicated in the table, the Government includes a number of other cash grants payable to the Council in the calculation of the Core Spending Power.
- ***Under-Indexing of Business Rates*** – this is a cash grant payable to the Council to reflect the Government's decisions to not increase the national business rates multiplier by inflation (as is normally required by Business Rate legislation). The policy intention is to relieve businesses of the burden of additional business rates costs and the purpose of the grant is to compensate Councils for the loss of income that they would otherwise have received. ***For the purposes of the provisional/final Settlement, this amount is unlikely to change but the actual grant payable to the Council, and which will be used in the Council's budget, will be based on the estimated performance of business rates during the year;***
  - ***Funding for Social Care*** – these are cash grants payable to the Council for investment in Adult and Children's Social Care, either directly by the Council or as part of a pooling arrangement with the NHS. ***They are unlikely to change between the provisional and final Settlement.*** As the Executive Board will be aware, the grants have come in different forms over recent years, as Table 2 below illustrates:-

**Table 2: Additional Grant Funding for Social Care (excl Social Care Precept)**

	2019/20 £000	2020/21 £000	2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000
Improved Better Care Fund	7,339	8,104	8,104	8,349	8,349	8,349
Social Care Grant		4,925	6,551	8,813	8,813	8,813
Social Care Support Grant	1,306	-	-			
Winter Pressures Grants	764	-	-	-		
Market Sust/Fair Funding	-	-	-	516	1,790	3,344
Independent Living Funding	-	-	-	386	386	386
Equal of 2% ASC Precept	-	-	-	-	995	1,990
Additional Social Care Grant	-	-	-	-	3,774	5,469
Discharge Fund	-	-	-	-	1,171	1,951
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,409</b>	<b>13,029</b>	<b>14,655</b>	<b>18,064</b>	<b>25,278</b>	<b>30,302</b>

- Table 2 above includes an additional £2.69m for Social Care (either Adults or Childrens). There is also £1.554m for Market Sustainability and Improvement and £780k for a Discharge Fund. At this stage, no detail has been provided on any conditions related to the use of this funding but it is anticipated that those conditions that have applied in 2023/24 will be unchanged. The Independent Living Funding Grant of £386k is the same as in the current year but aside from being shown separately here has been rolled-into the Social Care Grant.

#### *New Homes Bonus*

- 5.20 The New Homes Bonus (NHB) is now in its twelfth year as part of the Local Government Finance system. The original policy intention of NHB was to provide a financial incentive to local authorities to encourage the building of new homes and/or bringing empty homes back into use.
- 5.21 Despite consulting on proposals in 2021 to amend the NHB Scheme, the Government has decided again to retain the present scheme for a further financial year. As has become the norm in recent years, allocations are for one year only with no payment of legacy amounts from previous years (as has previously been the case). For 2024/25, the Government will provide NHB to reflect new housing and empty houses brought into use in the year up to October 2023. This amounts to £830k (compared to £401k in 2023/24).
- 5.22 As has been the case in previous year, it has been assumed that there will be no further NHB payments after 2024/25.

#### *Services Grant*

- 5.23 For 2024/25, the Government has again reduced the overall amount of the Service Grant funding available for Councils to £76.9m. Although not explicitly stated, it does appear the reduction in the grant is being used to fund the changes in other grants (such as Revenue Support Grant and New Homes Bonus).
- 5.24 The Council's allocation of Services Grant will be £284k (compared to £1.802m in 2023/24). This is a cash grant and unlikely to change at the Final Settlement.

#### *Public Health Grant*

- 5.25 Indicative allocations of the Public Health Grant for 2024/25 were released by the Government in March 2023 (along with the 2023/24 allocations). These showed that the Council's grant would be £16.2m in 2023/24 (a 1.4% increase when compared to the amount for 2023/24).



## Council Tax

5.26 The Government has assumed that the Council will raise £68.627m in Council Tax in 2024/25 as part of their assessment of the Core Spending Power. This is based on the following assumptions:-

- applying the average annual growth in the Council Tax Base between 2019/20 and 2023/24 to project growth in the tax base for 2024/25; and
- that the Council will increase its Council Tax in line with the maximum allowable level set out by the Council Tax Referendum Principles for 2024/25. That is 2.99% for general Council Tax and 2% for the Adult Social Care Precept.

5.27 At this stage, the estimate of Council Tax receipts assumed in the Medium Term Financial Plan (version 7) is based on the following assumptions:-

- a Council Taxbase for 2024/25 of 36,718.75 (currently subject to review);
- an increase in the general Council Tax of 2.99% and an increase in the Social Care Precept of 2%. Both of these reflect the maximum allowable levels set out by the Council Tax Referendum Principles for 2024/25.

5.28 Whilst the Executive Board should note the assumptions in the MTFP at stage, the decision to increase Council Tax is ultimately a matter for Council to take. ***It is, therefore, possible that the Council Tax yield assumed may change subject to the outcome of that decision.***

## Update Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/27

5.29 The Provisional Settlement is one of the key building blocks of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2024/27. Given the release of the Settlement, an opportunity has been taken to update the MTFP. The MTFP has been developed using a range of assumptions, not least those necessary to estimate the amount of funding available to the Council. In the light of the provisional Settlement, it is now possible to update the MTFP with the Council's funding allocations (accepting that both Business Rates Retained and Council Tax amounts are subject to change for the reasons set out above). A summary of the updated MTFP is provided in the Table 3 below:-

**Table 3: Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/27 (as at December 2023)**

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000
Portfolio Budgets	163,237	162,150	162,195
Other Corporate I & E	17,788	30,864	40,037
<b>Net Revenue Expenditure</b>	<b>181,025</b>	<b>193,014</b>	<b>202,232</b>
Less Core Funding	(101,987)	(102,917)	(103,865)
Less Council Tax	(68,886)	(72,949)	(77,028)
Less Collection Fund	(1,265)	(400)	(400)
<b>Shortfall before Reserves</b>	<b>8,887</b>	<b>16,748</b>	<b>20,940</b>
Change in Specific Reserves	(2,496)	(1,036)	(536)
Change in GF Balance	-	-	-
<b>Funding 'Gap'</b>	<b>6,391</b>	<b>15,712</b>	<b>20,404</b>

<b>In Year Funding 'Gap'</b>	<b>6,391</b>	<b>9,321</b>	<b>4,692</b>
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- 5.30 As the table indicates, the forecast funding gap for the period to 2026/27 is now estimated to be £20.4m with the most immediate issue being a gap of £6.4m in 2024/25. Further work is underway to firm up the Council's budget estimates and to develop options to bridge this gap and this will form part of subsequent reports on the development of the Council's budget for 2024/25.

#### *Other Budget Changes/Policy Decisions*

- 5.31 A review of the robustness of the Council's Base Budget continue. This is with a view to ensuring that any underlying and, arguably, unavoidable budget pressures are reflected properly in the budget and relate more accurately to activity currently being undertaken. Likewise, it is being used to identify any compensating areas of budget surplus. At the same time, a range of policy matters are arising which equally may need consideration as do those issues that are contributing to the Council's forecast overspend in the current financial year. At this stage, further work is required to determine whether any of these matters should feature in the Council's budget.

#### **Next Steps**

- 5.32 As indicated above, this report provides an update on the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement and the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan. Now that the details of the Settlement are known, further work will be undertaken on the development of the budget. Subject to confirmation of the final Local Government Finance Settlement, ultimately, it is for the Finance Council on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2024 to agree the Council's budget for the next financial year.

## **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 – Response to the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2024/25

<b>VERSION:</b>	1
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	Dean Langton – Strategic Director of Finance of Finance and Resources
<b>DATE:</b>	
<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS:</b>	None

Date: 12<sup>th</sup> January 2024  
My Ref:  
Please ask for: Dean Langton  
Direct Dial: 01254 666703  
Email address: [dean.langton@blackburn.gov.uk](mailto:dean.langton@blackburn.gov.uk)

***Sent via e-mail***

Dear Sir,

**Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2024/25  
Response to Consultation**

I am writing on behalf of Blackburn with Darwen Council in response to your consultation on the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024/25. Responses to the specific consultation questions are provided at the end of this letter. In the meantime, I would like to make the following comments and suggestions.

In general terms, we are grateful that the Government has, to some extent, recognised the funding needs of local authorities, particularly in relation to Social Care. We are disappointed, however, that the headline increase in Core Spending Power is based on the assumption that Councils will raise their Council Tax by the maximum permissible without a referendum. This leaves Councils like Blackburn with Darwen, with proportionately more people on low incomes than most other Councils, with the difficult choice about whether to increase Council Tax bills to bring in desperately needed funding when we are aware of the significant burden this could place on residents already suffering from a cost of living crisis.

On the other matters related to the Provisional Settlement, we have the following comments:-

- *Review of the Funding Regime, Multi-Year Settlements and Adequacy of Funding*

Prior to the announcement of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, I accepted that with a General Election expected in the next 12 months or so and noting the Government's view that '*now is the time for stability and continuity*', the possibility of the Government doing anything fundamentally different to previous years' settlements when it is needed the most was remote. I have not been disappointed.

Despite the fundamental reforms required to the Local Government Finance system, these have been put off until after the next General Election. At the same time, the next financial year will be the sixth in succession where Councils have been given a 1-year only settlement which does nothing to support Councils' ability to plan and take actions over the medium term. And finally, there is little new funding for Local Government despite the significant pressures that all Councils are under to deliver statutory services.

- *Funding based on Needs*

We have previously commented that the move away from a funding regime based on the relative needs of Councils has put authorities such as Blackburn with Darwen, which has cost pressures arising from areas of high deprivation in parts of our urban

areas combined with some degree of sparsity across the rest of the Borough, at a significant disadvantage in comparison to other more affluent areas.

As we have previously set out, despite our best efforts, it has not been possible for Blackburn with Darwen Council to generate sufficient resources locally to counter the cumulative loss of Revenue Support Grant. Aside from the inadequacies of the Council Tax system to do this, this is largely because some of the economic and social issues in Blackburn with Darwen – a difficult housing market, lack of inward investment due to limited connectivity, low skills levels and significant levels of worklessness – are deep seated and, as demonstrated in previous years with programmes such as Housing Market Renewal, Neighbourhood Renewal, require significant funding from Central Government to deliver a necessary step change. That funding has not been made available by Government because the policies employed, as with the New Homes Bonus Scheme, redirect such funding away from Councils like ours.

At the heart of this issue is the absolute disconnect between the Council's Taxbases and any funding received direct from Government in the form of Revenue Support Grant. Previously, Councils with a low taxbase due to the nature of their housing stock, received a higher share of Revenue Support Grant funding to compensate this inability to raise tax locally (a policy known as 'equalisation'). Since 2013/14, that method of equalisation is less prominent in the Funding Settlement and, given the Government's control on Council Tax increases through the Referendum Principles, any ability of the Council to raise Council Tax to compensate for the loss of Revenue Support Grant has been inhibited.

To that end, I urge the Government to consider whether, for those Councils that have long-standing economic and social issues that constrain their ability to be self-financing, the needs-based assessment of funding allocations should adequately reflect these matters to ensure that a basic level of service provision is possible. Given Blackburn with Darwen has a number of areas of high deprivation, this is an issue which needs to be properly factored into any formulaic approach to future funding allocations and the link between a low taxbase and the calculation of Revenue Support Grant needs to be restored.

At the same time, Government needs to provide adequate resources for investment in infrastructure in places like Blackburn with Darwen to make up for the underlying lack of investment experienced over many years that has led to the inability of the local economy to grow and compete with other places. We acknowledge investments such as the Darwen Town Deal and the Levelling Up Funding (for Blackburn Town Centre and improvements to Junction 5 on the M65 Motorway). But, more investment funding is required. In this respect, I am hopeful that our plans to create a County Combined Authority for Lancashire (in partnership with Lancashire County Council and Blackpool Borough Council) will provide the confidence in the Government to devolve additional powers and resources that will transform the economy of Lancashire as it has done in other places.

- *Funding for Social Care*

I welcome the Government's decision to provide additional funding for Social Care, reflecting the inflationary pressures for both Councils and Social Care Providers.

I note that in part this is funding that was to be used to fund the Adult Social Care reforms. As this is the case, I would urge the Government to consider what additional funding will be necessary to support the implementation of reforms when they are due rather than relying on the funding Councils will now use to support the Adult Social Care system as it currently operates. In this respect, the Government should consider how the additional funding provided to the NHS should be redirected to both preventative and early help activities to support a more sustainable health and social care system.

On Children's Social Care, I am disappointed that there has been little recognition of the immense pressure that Children's Social Care Teams are experiencing at present. It is particularly disappointing that the Government has failed to take any noticeable action to deal with the 'profiteering' by Social Care Providers. In many respects, the Children's Social Care system is broken with Council's often held to ransom by Social Care Providers who are demanding extortionate fees for placements. If the Government is not prepared to take action here it should provide adequate funding to Local Government to meet these costs.

- *New Homes Bonus*

I appreciate the Government's decision to roll-forward the present New Homes Bonus Scheme for a further year. However, given the intrinsic unfairness of the New Homes Bonus Scheme, which does nothing other than redistribute what was Revenue Support Grant funding in an inequitable way our preference would have been to see the Scheme abolished and the funding distributed to Councils on the basis of their Settlement Funding (even using the current figures from 2013/14).

- *Council Tax*

I note the Government's referendum principles for 2024/25. As I have set out about above, I do take issue with the Government's assumption that funding increases for Local Government are predicated on the maximum permissible increase in Council Tax. This requires difficult decisions from Councils that, after years of austerity, need to raise funding to sustain services but from residents, many of whom are already facing significant hardship due to the cost of living crisis.

Equally, if self-funding is the Government's intended model for Local Government there should also be greater flexibility for Councils to vary council tax discounts for example. In particular, we can see no reason why Councils do not currently have the freedom to vary the level of all discounts according to local circumstances should they wish to do so.

At the same time, of all Unitary Councils, Blackburn with Darwen has one of the highest number of properties in Band A. These make up almost 60% of properties in Blackburn with Darwen and, as a consequence, the Council has a low taxbase relative to other similar Councils. This means that historically, the Council has had to increase its Council Tax by more than the average in order to maintain its tax yield and overall resource level. The corollary to this is that Council Tax is now becoming increasingly unaffordable for many residents, not only those in Band A properties but particularly those who live in larger properties who are on middle incomes. We urge the Government to consider a review of Council Tax at the earliest opportunity to create a more progressive tax system and, if possible, as part of the Fair Funding Review to make it more equitable across the Country.

And to reiterate, increasing Council Tax bills places a significant burden on households at a time when other inflationary pressures have resulted in a cost of living crisis that is affecting significantly some of our most vulnerable residents in a disproportionate way.

- *Household Support Fund*

Whilst I acknowledge the financial support provided by the Government through the Household Support Fund, it is hugely disappointing that no announcement has yet been made on the future of the Fund. The current funding is due to end on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. I am clear that the availability of this funding has been an essential 'lifeline' for some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

- *Use of Reserves*

I note the comments in the Secretary of State's written statement on the use of reserves.

I would reiterate the Local Government Association's views on this matter. Councils hold reserves for a reason. Earmarked reserves are held by Council so they can plan for the future and deal with known risks; unallocated reserves are held so that Councils can respond to immediate events and emergencies. Reserves can only be spent once and using reserves to fund underlying sustained costs pressures is not a solution to the long-term financial issues that councils face.

Finally, our responses to the specific questions set out in the consultation paper follow below and we trust that you will take these and the comments made above into consideration prior to confirming the final settlement for 2024/25.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Vicky McGurk  
Executive Member for Finance and Governance  
Blackburn with Darwen Council

## **Responses to Consultation on the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement**

### ***Question 1: Do you agree with the government's proposed methodology for the distribution of Revenue Support Grant in 2024/25?***

Yes, in part. We acknowledge the uprating of the Revenue Support Grant for 2024/25 by inflation but note that this appears to have been funded by a reduction in the Services Grant, resulting in a limited net increase in funding for the Council.

We reiterate our concerns regarding the extent to which relative needs and resources are assessed and taken into account when distributing central resources for local government. Hence, we would argue that the current methodology remains sub-optimal, not least because it is based on out-of-date data.

We acknowledge that the Government is committed to reviewing the assessment of needs and resources for local authorities. That aside, I am deeply disappointed that the implementation of this assessment will not be in the life of the current Parliament.

I remain aggrieved at the Government's response to those Councils that, as a consequence of the formulaic approach to the allocation of Revenue Support Grant, will 'suffer' negative RSG again in 2024/25 (and indeed in previous years). In our view, it is contrary to both the calculation methodology and, in relation to the current year's allocation, the acceptance of the 4-year settlement that the Government has chosen to find funding to compensate these Councils, most of which have:-

- not suffered the extent of reduction in Revenue Support Grant as Blackburn with Darwen yet are being reimbursed funding;
- by virtue of their taxable capacity, have been largely protected from funding reductions;
- received more New Homes Bonus than Blackburn with Darwen given they have functional housing markets and because the Scheme as it presently operates redistributes funding in way that favours areas of housing growth that, without New Homes Bonus funding would arguably experience housing growth in any event.

Fundamentally, it remains unfair.

### ***Question 2: Do you agree with the government's proposals to roll grants into the local government finance settlement in 2024/25?***

The Council has no view on this matter.

### ***Question 3: Do you agree with the proposed package of council tax referendum principles for 2024/25?***

No, we fundamentally disagree with the proposal for a separate Council Tax referendum principle for all Councils. And it is incongruous that the Government is seeking to set referendum limits for Council Tax increases by some local authorities yet:-

- allowing the Mayoral Combined Authorities to precept without limit;
- allowing Council Tax flexibilities for Council's that have been provided with exceptional financial support;



At the same time, if self-funding of local government is the Government's intended model there should also be greater flexibility for Councils to vary council tax discounts for example. In particular, we can see no reason why Councils do not have the freedom to vary the level of all discounts (including the Single Persons Discount) according to local circumstances should they consider it necessary.

As has been set out previously, of all Unitary Councils, Blackburn with Darwen has one of the highest numbers of properties in Band A. These make up almost 60% of properties in Blackburn with Darwen and, as a consequence, the Council has a low taxbase relative to other similar Councils. This means that historically, the Council has had to increase its Council Tax by more than the average in order to maintain its tax yield and overall resource level. The corollary to this is that Council Tax is now becoming increasingly unaffordable for many residents, not only those in Band A properties but particularly those who live in larger properties who are on middle incomes. We urge the Government to consider a review of Council Tax at the earliest opportunity to create a more progressive tax system and, if possible, as part of the Fair Funding Review to make it more equitable across the Country.

We agree that there should not be referendum limits for Council Tax for either Mayoral Combined Authorities or Town and Parish Councils on the basis of our view that referendum principles should not apply to any local authority either. Decisions on Council Tax should be a matter for local politicians to determine.

***Question 4: Do you agree with the government's proposals to maintain the Funding Guarantee for 2024/25?***

We agree with the principle of a Funding Guarantee but consider that such a guarantee should have applied throughout the period of austerity to make the distribution of funding much more even handed.

We note that majority of Councils receiving this funding are Shire District Councils and that it appears to be funded from the repurposing of the Services Grant to the detriment of places like Blackburn with Darwen. It is our view that the Government should provide new funding for the Funding Guarantee and that the Services Grant.

***Question 5: Do you agree with the government's proposals on funding for social care as part of the local government finance settlement in 2024/25?***

We welcome the increase in funding for Social Care, particularly at a time when the demands on both Adult and Children's Social Care are increasing.

However, whilst this additional funding is welcome, we remain concerned that it will not be sufficient for the Council to invest in the development of preventative and/or early help services that are necessary to take the pressure off of acute services. Equally, there are continuing concerns about the fragility of the care market and the social care workforce which will inevitably create pressures on Council's social care services.

Whilst we acknowledge further funding has been made available to prepare for the implementation of Social Care reforms in the form of the Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care Fund, it is my view that given the use of the new social care funding to deal with current pressures, more funding will be required to ensure the reforms are implemented fully and effectively. Of course, the specific funding requirements will only be known once we have full details of the changes, how they will be implemented and what they might mean for a place like Blackburn with Darwen. Equally, an early understanding of the full funding allocations and how they have been derived, including the funding provided to the NHS, is essential so that we can compare them to our costs estimates once they can be done.

**Question 6: Do you agree with the government's proposals for New Homes Bonus in 2024/25?**

No, it is my view that the Scheme as it stands now is so far removed from its original construct and policy intention that it should be withdrawn and the funding should be added back to the Revenue Support Grant.

I am disappointed that the Government has yet not reformed the New Homes Bonus scheme as set out in the Financial Settlement for Local Government for 2021/22. The Scheme in its present form does nothing to incentivise the delivery of new housing or bringing empty properties back into use and is in need of reform.

I am not in favour of the top-slicing of RSG and allocating it via New Homes Bonus. We feel that the distribution of resources in this way leads to more resources going to those Councils that already have greater spending power/resource capacity whereas the allocation of RSG does at least in some way have regard to the relative needs of councils. In our view, this compounds the unfair allocation of funding.

I am also not in favour of the 0.4% threshold for new housing/empty homes brought back into use, below which no New Homes Bonus is paid. This directly discriminates against areas of low housing growth for no apparent reason other than to distribute funding to places that are experiencing growth for reasons outside the scope of New Homes Bonus.

The Government implemented reforms to the New Homes Bonus regime three years ago as it felt that although the Bonus was successful in encouraging authorities to welcome housing growth, it did not reward those authorities who were the most open to growth. For some authorities it is not a question of being 'open to growth' but rather a reflection of the viability of the local housing market and wider local economy that inhibits the opportunities for housing growth which results in Council's like Blackburn with Darwen being penalised under the Bonus regime.

**Question 7: Do you agree with the government's proposals for Rural Services Delivery Grant in 2024/25?**

As I have said before, the grant for rural services delivery seems to address a specific factor impacting on needs of local authorities. In this case it is sparsity and whilst we recognise the additional costs that stem from this it is but only one factor amongst a number that drive funding needs. **Another factor would be deprivation which, in the past consultation on Review of Local Authorities' Relative Needs and Resources, the Government has previously acknowledged as 'an important driver for some specific services'.**

To that end, I am unclear why the Government has chosen to make available increasing amounts of additional funding for this factor but chooses to ignore other factors that impact on the costs of many other local authorities. We would strongly urge the Government to reconsider whether additional funding should be made available for Council areas recognised as being within the upper quartile of deprived areas according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

***Question 8: Do you agree with the government's proposals for Services Grant in 2024/25?***

Yes, I welcome the proposal to pay Services Grant in 2024/25.

However, I would welcome greater transparency on the change in the grant from 2023/24 to 2024/25 as it is unclear exactly what amounts have been deducted from the funding available and how that funding is being used. By way of an example, there is reference to using the grant for Supporting Families funding in 2023/24 but it is unclear whether this is to be new funding or to support allocations already made to Councils.

***Question 9: Do you have any comments on the impact of the proposals for the 2024/25 settlement outlined in this consultation document on the aims outlined above? Please provide evidence to support your comments.***

None specifically.

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A  
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted