

# EXECUTIVE BOARD

## Thursday, 10 October 2024

### PRESENT

Councillor Phil Riley (Chair)

Councillor Julie Gunn	Children, Young People and Education
Councillor Mahfooz Hussain	Digital and Customer Services
Councillor Vicky McGurk	Finance and Governance
Councillor Quesir Mahmood	Growth and Development
Councillor Jim Smith	Environment and Communities
Councillor Damian Talbot	Housing and Public Health

### ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor Mustafa Desi	Leader of the Opposition Group
Councillor Neil Slater	Conservative Group
Zainab Shah	Youth MP
Denise Park	Chief Executive
Dean Langton	Strategic Director Finance and Resources
Asad Laher	Deputy Director, Legal and Governance
Jane Watson	Democratic and Scrutiny Lead

### RESOLUTIONS

#### 1 Welcome and Apologies

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Phil Riley, welcomed all present to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Councillor Jackie Floyd and from the Youth MPs Nadeem Iqbal and Ethan Wood.

#### 2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2024 be agreed as a correct record.

#### 3 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

#### 4 Equality Implications

The Leader asked Members to confirm that they had considered and understood the Equality Impact Assessments associated with reports on the agenda ahead of making any decision.

*The Chair advised that he would be taking the following two items of business together as the response was similar for both questions.*

## **5 Public Forum**

In accordance with Part 3 of the Executive Board Procedure Rules for questions/statements by members of the public, one question had been received from Ann Cockram relating to the illegal traveller encampment to the South of Whitehall Park, Darwen. She was concerned that the travellers had been allowed to completely ignore the Stop Notice that had been served on them and she asked why the Council had failed to police this Notice by allowing them to continue decimating the wildlife and developing and placing numerous caravans and vehicles on the site. She also asked why there had been so little communication from the Council regarding the travellers' continued development of the site and damage to the surrounding area.

## **6 Questions by Non-Executive Members**

In accordance with Part 4 of the Executive Board Procedure Rules for questions/statements by Non-Executive Member, one question had been received from Councillor Anthony Shaw also relating to the illegal traveller encampment to the South of Whitehall Park, Darwen.

Councillor Shaw asked a number of questions relating to the Stop Notice and the planning application for the site. He asked what type of work constituted a notable breach of the Stop Notice; did this allow for smaller breaches; how much work, as specified in the Stop Notice, could be carried out on any occasion the Stop Notice was breached. In relation to the planning application, he said the Planning Department had been waiting for over 4 months for the submission of Biodiversity Net Gain documentation in support of the application. He asked how long the applicants would be given to supply this information and if a deadline would be given as the biodiversity and environment on the site continued to be degraded due to the contravention of the Stop Notice. Councillor Shaw also asked if an ecological survey of the land had been scheduled and when it could be expected to be submitted.

In response to questions from Ann Cockram and Councillor Shaw, Councillor Quesir Mahmood said the Council shared many of the concerns of residents regarding the unauthorised encampment. A Full Stop Notice had been issued in July, which restricted further engineering operations from taking place.

Officers continued to visit the site on a regular basis to investigate all reports of non-compliance with the Stop Notice, or any other breaches of planning control which may be occurring. Although there were records of complaints and evidence provided by enforcement officers there had been no records of any breaches at the site which would merit a prosecution or other legal action. Any decision to take matter further would be taken following legal advice on evidence obtained by the enforcement officers, so it would not be appropriate to prejudice any legal process by speculating as

to what may or may not be a breach.

Outstanding information for the planning application was being compiled by the applicant, with surveys expected this month from a third-party ecologist appointed by the applicant. The biodiversity assessment must provide the site biodiversity value as it was before any development took place. The Council would continue to chase the planning application so that the retrospective development could be assessed in the appropriate way.

Councillor Mahmood continued by advising that although the Council requested that a planning application should be submitted urgently when the encampment was created, a valid application did not come forward. Therefore, the Council took prompt action by serving the Enforcement Notice and the Stop Notice. Everything that could be done with the Council's limited planning powers had been done. However, as the appeal to the Enforcement Notice was now in the hands of the Government's Planning Inspectorate, this could be a lengthy process.

Officers had provided regular updates for the Ward Councillors and there would be a formal public consultation when the planning application had been registered and published. Councillor Mahmood also advised that there had been numerous public updates shared on The Shuttle and across Council channels and direct responses had been provided to residents wherever possible:

<https://theshuttle.org.uk/update-on-unauthorised-encampment-in-darwen/?highlight=Whitehall>

<https://www.facebook.com/search/posts/?q=Whitehall%20Travellers>

## **7 Youth MPs Update**

The Youth MP Zainab Shah provided a verbal update on recent events and activities. The Young Blackburn with Darwen Forum met at IMO where they discussed the tree planting process within the Borough and suggested possible planting sites; informed the young people on the Children's and Young People Plan and the co-designing of a new Plan for Blackburn with Darwen.

The Youth MPs and other members of the Youth Forum had continued in helping interview new members of staff which had included the Commissioning Manager, Start Well Manager posts and Social Workers for the Assessment Team.

Work was continuing with the Gambling Harms campaign with a residential event for young people where further progress was made on the film, they were making which would focus on the harms gambling addiction could cause. The film would be presented to the Executive Board at a future meeting.

Young people across the partnerships were being encouraged to develop pieces of work for the forthcoming National Youth Work week in November. The theme this year was "what does youth work mean to me" and would be celebrating inclusivity and diversity in youth work settings. A showcase of this work was scheduled for 7<sup>th</sup> November at Blackburn YouthZone.

## **8 Executive Member Reports**

### **Leader**

The Leader had no updates to give.

## **ADULT SOCIAL CARE & HEALTH**

## **CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION**

### **8.1 Children's Services Improvement Journey**

The Executive Board received a report which provided an update on the Children's Services Improvement Journey over the last 12 months. This included the recent ILACS Focused Visit conducted by HMI Ofsted Inspectorate on Care Leavers.

The report provided updates on the departmental improvements over the last 11 months:

- Fostering Recruitment Hub
- Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Family Help
- Corporate Parenting
- Quality Assurance
- Children's Commissioning
- Sufficiency Strategy Position
- Inspection Readiness
- Data

### **RESOLVED**

- (1) That the progress and improvements made over the last 12 months be noted.
- (2) That the findings of the Ofsted ILACS Focused Visit for Care Leavers be noted.

## **ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITIES**

### **9 Together an Active Future**

The Executive Board received a report which provided an update on the Pennine Lancashire's Together an Active Future (TaAF) project.

TaAF had been working successfully across and within the six Local Authority areas (Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley, Pendle, Rossendale, Ribble Valley and Hyndburn) both at a local level as well as exploring universal approaches across the whole geographic footprint.

TaAF had successfully secured an additional £497,435 of lottery funding from Sport England to continue to provide essential co-ordination functions across the Pennine programme through to the end of December 2025.

It was noted additional funding may be available beyond this date. There was an opportunity to put a submission in for the next phase of funding called 'Deepening' in early 2025 to provide continuation of TaAF influenced activity across Pennine Lancashire through to 2028. There were indications this would be less than £4m, however Sport England were encouraging TaAF to co-develop a Pennine Lancashire Deepening bid.

## **RESOLVED**

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That the award £497,435 grant from Sport England for spend on Together an Active Future's co-ordination function be accepted.
- (3) That the opportunity for further Sport England funding (December 2025/2028) be noted and the co-design process and timeline for a full Deepening bid to be co-developed be endorsed and submitted on behalf of Pennine Lancashire in early 2025.
- (4) That if successfully awarded by Sport England to Together an Active Future the spend of the Deepening funding be approved and accepted.

## **HOUSING AND PUBLIC HEALTH**

### **10 Asylum Dispersal Grant**

A report was submitted inform the Executive Board of the Home Office Asylum Dispersal Grant 2024/25 of £561,000 allocated to Blackburn with Darwen and sought approval in respect of proposals as to how the funding was used.

The Asylum Dispersal Grant was provided to Local Authorities with the aim of ensuring that the Home Office and Local Authorities worked collaboratively on the delivery of the government's 'Full Dispersal' policy announced in April 2022. The financial support provided via this grant was to ensure Asylum Seekers and refugees were housed in safe and sustainable accommodation across the UK.

For 2024/25 and beyond it was proposed the existing Asylum Seeker support model currently operating in Blackburn with Darwen be extended. It was proposed that the Asylum Disposal Grant continue to be used to fund dedicated housing and integration and engagement of staff, along with commissioning services in the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector to provide specialist wraparound support services. It was also proposed that some of the grant continue to be utilised to assist with the costs of accessing and setting up tenancies for asylum seekers, as well as a proportion used for temporary accommodation cost pressures that

positive decisions on asylum claims could create.

## **RESOLVED**

- (1) That the grant provided to Blackburn with Darwen be noted and acceptance of the funding allocation of £561,000 be authorised.
- (2) That authority be granted to create a supplementary revenue estimate equivalent to the grant and it be agreed that the funding be allocated and utilised as proposed within the report to enable the grant to be spent for its intended purpose.

### **11 Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategy 202530**

The Executive Board were presented with the above Strategy which provided a shared vision for mental health and suicide prevention for Blackburn with Darwen over the next five years (2025/30). It was a place-based strategy, developed collectively by a range of local health and care organisations and showed how these partners intended to deliver the Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care System Mental Health Strategy in a way that was relevant to the residents of Blackburn with Darwen.

## **RESOLVED**

That the Blackburn with Darwen Place-Based Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategy 2025/2023 be approved.

## **DIGITAL & CUSTOMER SERVICES**

### **GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT**

#### **12 Strategic Asset Management Plan Update**

A report providing an update on the Council's Strategic Asset Management Plan was considered by the Board. The report reviewed progress against the Key Performance Indicators and Action Plans which were set out in the Plan and provided an update on activity to date.

Progress was highlighted in relation to the Council's Investment Estate and the Asset Reviews.

## **RESOLVED**

That the progress made be noted.

#### **13 Amended Highways Capital Programme Report 2024-25**

The Executive Board considered a report on the Amended Highways Capital Programme 2024/25 which provided an update on capital funding and therefore project budgets. Following the revised financial carry forward

and awarded DfT Grant Funding during 2024/25, the approved project budget allocations required amending to balance the overall budget of the capital programme within itself.

Additional schemes had been included for delivery in 2024/25 by reducing overall project costs, and by combining projects by asset type and project delivery methods.

## **RESOLVED**

- (1) That the Amended Highways Capital Programme Report for 2024/25 be approved.
- (2) That the addition of 3 schemes to the programme, namely the resurfacing of Jack Walker Way, Shadsworth Road and West Park Road, Blackburn be noted.
- (3) That delegated authority be granted to the Strategic Director of Growth, in consultation with the Executive Member for Growth and Development, to amend, seek and accept tenders subject to adequate budget provision.

## **FINANCE & GOVERNANCE**

### **14 Development of the General Fund Revenue Budget 2024-28**

The Executive Board were presented with a further update on the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan 2025/28 which set out the process of developing savings options to balance the Council's budget for 2025/26.

A summary of the updated MTFP was provided at Table 1 in the report along with a more detailed analysis in Appendix A attached to the report. Appendix B provided an analysis of the movement in the MTFP shown in the table and compared to last MTFP reported to the Executive Board in June 2024.

The Executive Board were reminded of the key risks to delivery of the budget which was also set out in the report along with other grant funding that had been received or was receivable by the Council.

There also continued to be a range of matters that may have an impact on the development of the Council's budget. This included a range of pressures with some specific service-related matters that would need a 'watching-brief' to ensure any decisions that impacted on the Council's budget were reflected accordingly.

## **RESOLVED**

- (1) That the Council's current financial position based on the financial outturn for 2023/24 and the Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring exercise, both of which were considered by the Executive Board earlier this year be noted.

- (2) That the continuing uncertainty with the funding outlook for the Council, not least that any progress on Local Government Finance Reforms was likely to take place after the Local Government Finance Settlement 2025/26 and the upcoming Spending Review be noted.
- (3) That the update to the Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2025/28, as shown at Appendix A attached to the report, be noted and that a further update be provided once details of the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2025/26 was known.
- (4) That it be noted that all Portfolio Holders have been requested to undertake a review of all fees and charges in their Portfolios, in line with the Council's Constitution and the agreed Fees and Charges Framework, with a view to maximising the amount of income received by the council by implementing any changes from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2025 (where it was possible to do so).
- (5) That Portfolio Holders be asked, in conjunction with lead Strategic Directors/Directors to identify and bring forward budget savings options for 2025/26.
- (6) That it be agreed that any such budget proposals arising from the work above be considered by the Executive Board in due course (and subject to the proposal on consultation below).
- (7) That subject to the work above and agreement with Councillors, it be agreed that some form of public and business-based consultation on the Council's budget should take place over Autumn 2024 with a view to informing decisions on the Council's budget for 2025/26.

**15 Corporate Issues**

None.

**16 Matters referred to the Executive Board**

No matters had been referred to the Executive Board.

Signed at a meeting of the Executive Board  
on Thursday, 14 November 2024  
(being the ensuing meeting on the Executive Board) by

CHAIR