

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR MOHAMMED KHAN

Date: 1st October 2020

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

Health and Wellbeing

On 2nd September, the Health and Wellbeing Board held its second meeting since the introduction of restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting was conducted remotely using Microsoft Teams and enabled supportive and constructive dialogue with community partners.

The agenda was dominated by discussion of the Borough's response to the COVID-19 pandemic locally and plans for managing the next phase of the pandemic, including winter pressures.

Health and Care Integration

As virtual working continues to take place across the Health, Care and Community system, the East, North, West and Darwen Primary Care Neighbourhood Groups (PCNs) have resumed their monthly partnership meetings which has been most welcomed by all. To date, key items for discussion have included a recap and reflection of work over the COVID 19 period, an overview of the current health priorities utilising data and intelligence, the planned roll out for a flu and winter communication campaign and an update on the development of social prescribing.

Four Social Prescribing Link Workers (SPLWs) are now up and running in each Primary Care Neighbourhood. They are working alongside health colleagues in Primary Care and within Integrated Neighbourhood Teams. Their focus is on the wider determinants of health and supporting residents via a range of non-medical intervention, which focus on both physical and mental wellbeing. A Social Prescribing Alliance is in development to ensure relevant services, particularly in the Voluntary Sector, are joined up and adding value to the work of the new link workers. To ensure the success of the model, it is vital that there is vibrant community activity to sustain support in neighbourhoods. This work is ongoing.

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

Our Community, Our Future social integration programme

While their regular work remains paused and news of MHCLG funding for the programme is still awaited, the Council's Social Integration team continues to play an important role in our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the roles they took on to support the work of the BwD Help Hub, members of the team have been supporting the Council's localised Test & Trace operation. Staff are contacting local residents whom the national Test & Trace system has failed to reach, and are seeing good rates of success. Members of the team have also joined the Council's community testing team. This gives them an opportunity to use their skills to speak to householders door-to-door about being tested for Coronavirus, and are helping to distribute around 10,000 home testing kits provided by the government.

The team has supported a research study into the impact of the pandemic on social integration being led by the University of Kent and the national cohesion network Belong. We have shared opportunities for local residents to take part in online surveys, focus groups via Zoom and one to one interviews with researchers. The findings of this research will help us to understand better, how COVID-19 has affected relations between different ethnic and religious communities in the borough and the extent to which these changes are likely to persist in the long term. Work continues on

Learning English Together website and a new ESOL teaching programme involving a range of local ESOL providers.

Community Volunteer Awards

I am sad to announce that the annual Community Volunteer Awards have now been cancelled for this year. The event was originally scheduled to take place at King George's Hall in July but due to the pandemic, this was moved to September. However, it has now been decided that it is not possible to hold the ceremony due to the ongoing situation.

The Community Volunteer awards is a wonderful event, showcasing the hardworking, dedicated and often selfless people that make our borough great. It brings together people of all ages from across Blackburn with Darwen, highlighting the best our borough has to offer. I am sure that the organisers, sponsors and nominees will come back bigger and better than ever when we are able to hold the event again.

Census 2021

A Census is undertaken every ten years and the next Census for England and Wales is scheduled for 21st March 2021. The Scottish Census has been moved to March 2022, but the Office for National Statistics (ONS) are still working towards a March 2021 Census for England and Wales. As you know, the Census provides us with a wealth of information and data, not available elsewhere, so it is important to achieve a good response to ensure we have the information and intelligence about our residents from which to plan services and make decisions. We have identified officers to undertake liaison roles working with ONS to support the process in our Borough.

The Census will mainly be done online and information on how to take part will be delivered to all our households. We also need to support those residents who struggle to get on-line to complete the census, and I am pleased to say our libraries and neighbourhood learning services have been awarded additional support to deliver this. The next stage of the project will be to work with the ONS Community Engagement Officer for our area, so that this person is linked in with community groups and organisations to engage our residents in the census process, to help them understand how their data will be used and the importance of taking part.

Council: Delivered by a strong and resilient Council

Lancashire local authority reorganisation

You will have seen in the local media that Lancashire County Council have made a proposal to central government to replace the 15 councils currently in Lancashire with three unitary authorities. This would bring big changes locally but I believe that this is the best thing for us as we look towards the future. I wrote to the government myself in October 2019 outlining a similar proposal. We look forward to hearing back from the government along with the publication of a Devolution and Recovery white paper this autumn.

COVID-19

As a Borough we have faced significant challenges I would like to thank all of our staff and partners who are working hard to support our residents and businesses during this very difficult time. This is a challenging time for all of us as we learn to live in this new era and respond to covid-19.

As a Borough with different restrictions in place across our community, it can be confusing and frustrating for our residents and businesses.

As ever we are constantly responding to the restrictions and guidance that the Government introduce and our social media channels and website are updated frequently with the latest information, despite the late and delayed announcements from the Government on a regular basis.

I will provide a further verbal update at the meeting.