



REPORT OF:	LEADER
TO:	POLICY COUNCIL
ON:	3rd DECEMBER 2020

2020 LOCAL AND NATIONAL REFLECTION; 2021 - FUTURE PRIORITIES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To outline key national and local policy challenges and proposals in relation to Local Government; reflect on the Council's performance over the last 12 months; and look ahead to the next 12 months.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Council is invited to:

- i. Note the content of the report
- ii. Note the overall performance of the Borough against its outcome measures
- iii. Note the overall performance of the Council against its own strategic objectives

3. NATIONAL REFLECTION

Coronavirus has clearly dominated national policy throughout 2020 and the Council's focus has been on the response to Covid-19. There are however a number of other key policy areas of national interest.

Budget 2020

In March 2020, the Chancellor announced the 2020 Budget. This included initial funding for the Covid-19 response for councils, businesses and individuals. A refreshed Affordable Homes Programme was launched, as well as announcements for comprehensive reforms to bring the planning system into the 21st century with a Planning White Paper in the spring. Commitments were also made to improve waste management, boosting recycling and reducing plastic pollution. Rollout of a fast-charging network for electric vehicles was also announced, alongside rollout of gigabit-capable broadband.

Structural reform and devolution

The English Devolution White Paper expected in summer 2020, has been delayed further, and we now anticipate it to be published in early 2021. The White Paper is expected to provide clarity on Local Government Reorganisation, Combined Authority and devolution. Mayoral areas with devolution deals are already demonstrating the significant benefits of bringing power and investment decisions closer to local communities and economies – even more so as areas respond to Covid-19. In October, the Secretary of State invited three areas to come forward with proposals to form new Unitary Authorities. This unfortunately did not include Pennine Lancashire or the wider Lancashire area, despite our request for an invitation in October 2019.

Reorganisation is still a priority for Blackburn with Darwen and we will continue to press the Government for an invitation to develop proposals.

Exit from the European Union

The UK left the EU on 31 January 2020. We are in the transition period and the future relationship between the UK and the EU is still under negotiation. From 1 January 2021, there will be new rules for businesses and citizens. At the time of writing, no final deal has been achieved between the UK and EU towards the future trading relationship between the two. Until negotiations between the two parties have been concluded, the potential future impact of Brexit on the local economy or on the operations of the local authority will remain unknown. However, the Local Authority has supported national efforts to inform local business on how best prepare for the UK final departure from the institutions of the EU including the Customs Union.

COVID-19 - Tackling inequalities for UK health and productivity

The Northern Health Science Alliance commissioned a report to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health and productivity in the Northern Powerhouse and to explore the opportunities for 'levelling up' regional health and productivity. The productivity and health gap that exists between the Northern Powerhouse and the rest of England is well documented. The productivity gap stands at £4 per person per hour and average life expectancy is two years lower in the North. The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed this regional context.

The key findings from the report show that an extra 12.4 more people per 100,000 died in the Northern Powerhouse than the rest of England due to COVID-19 and that an extra 57.7 more people per 100,000 died in the Northern Powerhouse than the rest of England due to all-causes. The extra 57.7 deaths per 100,000 could cost the UK economy an additional £6.8bn in lost productivity. Whilst reductions in mental wellbeing could cost the economy £5bn in reduced productivity. Research has found that unemployment rates, mental and financial wellbeing as well as other economic outcomes have been hardest hit in the Northern Powerhouse. In addition to the impact on adults, pre-pandemic child health in the Northern Powerhouse was poor and this has been exacerbated by adverse trends in poverty, education, employment and mental health.

The Northern Health Science Alliance is advising central government to pay particular attention to the importance of supporting the physical and mental health and development of the Northern Powerhouse as a route to increased prosperity via a COVID-19 recovery strategy that prioritises families with children.

4. LOCAL DELIVERY

Our existing Corporate Plan priorities still stand, providing the framework for our response to Covid-19 and our continuing council services. They are: People – a good quality of life for all our residents; Place – community pride in a vibrant place to live and visit; Economy – a strong and inclusive economy with continued growth; and Council – a strong and resilient council.

At Council Forum in July we provided a comprehensive report on our initial response to the pandemic including setting up the Help Hub and food distribution centre; redeploying staff to support essential services; moving our sports and cultural offer on line; distributing PPE; processing business grants at pace. Some services were paused initially and restarted as restrictions lifted. We have faced significant challenges, as other areas have. Restrictions in Blackburn with Darwen have been in place longer than any other area and our business and communities are severely impacted. Council Forum in October also received updates on our on-going response.

As reported at Executive Board on 12th November 2020, Covid-19 has created a significant shock to the national and local economy, and resulted in significant, unplanned expenditure and income losses for the Council. We will continue to monitor costs associated the pandemic and other emerging budget pressures.

Covid-19 has affected all of our lives and entwined with all of our council services in some way. Our services remain flexible to adapt to changes in restrictions, legislation and service reconfiguration.

Below reflects on some of our activity over the last 12 months whilst recognising the impact of Covid-19 on council services. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list. Highlights of all council activity are published frequently through our on-line news outlet – The Shuttle.

REFLECTION : THE LAST 12 MONTHS

PEOPLE:

A good quality of life for all of our residents

1. Supporting young people and raising aspirations
2. Safeguarding and supporting the most vulnerable people
3. Reducing health inequalities and improving health outcomes

Our schools have been open throughout the pandemic for vulnerable children and children of essential workers. From September 2020, all pupils were welcomed back. We have continued to support our schools throughout this period and established the Education Response Team providing dedicated support to school staff. The team offer advice and guidance, whilst linking with DfE and PHE.

This year we celebrated our Children’s Literature Festival on-line in September. The sessions have been streamed live from Blackburn Library into the Borough’s primary schools via Microsoft Teams. We also hosted an event on the Saturday, which enabled families to view a range of performances, including storytelling, author chats, and poetry, rap and illustrator sessions.

In line with national guidance, we restricted visitors to our care homes. This has been a very difficult time for those with loved ones in care homes and as well as for care home residents and staff. Our care homes have responded positively and introduced virtual contact between residents and their families.

Our Transforming Lives programme continues. Social isolation, mental health and parenting ability continue to be the top three identified needs. Due to Covid-19 and lockdown, referrals from Social Work Teams were routed directly through to the Help Hub for support. Transforming Lives partnership panel meetings were on hold from the outbreak of Covid-19 as staffing resources were re-directed to the development and staffing of the Help Hub. New ways of engaging and supporting people have been developed over recent months (mainly online through groups) and numbers have now started to increase.

Throughout the pandemic social work staff and our support service staff have maintained direct face-to-face visits for those families most at risk. Our Engage team have also used other ways to maintain contact with children and families such as virtual visits, garden visits, face time as well as activities such as football, bike rides and walks. The children have responded really well to the support offered and we continue to see positive outcomes achieved.

The Childhood Obesity Trailblazer programme continues at pace, the Food Resilience Alliance has political leadership driving the agenda forwards and

we are looking at the refresh of the Local Authorities Healthy Weight Declaration. A comprehensive life course consultation and engagement exercise around food, physical activity and healthy weight will take place in the New Year. There is the new 'BwD Stride and Ride' project group focussing on active travel and supporting school streets.

Our Holiday Activity and Food programme took place over the summer, led by a consortium of partners including the Council. We know that there is more work to do to ensure child poverty doesn't blight the futures of children and young people in our Borough, and that is why we will continue to work with partners to focus our efforts to tackle child poverty and holiday hunger over the coming months, including the government's new Holiday Hunger scheme.

Over the last 9 months encouraging people to be and stay active, wherever possible has been more important than ever for us all. Sport England funding has supported the Active BwD network to continue to connect with local organisations, communities and individuals to work together through these challenging times. Over £76,000 of Sport England funding has been committed since March, to test different ways of supporting local people and reducing activity inequalities. Pilot approaches have been influenced by the restrictions we have experienced. These include, learning how effective online and digital support programmes are for people who are currently inactive, suffer from poor mental wellbeing and who feel they are not able to enter a face-to-face gym environment. We have also launched the new Explore BwD walking App, which can be downloaded. This interactive approach helps people to find new places to walk in and around Blackburn with Darwen, and also to create personal favourite routes.

In September, we held our Adult Learner Awards virtually with the majority of our winners joining us on-line. There were 12 awards across all curriculum areas. All of the learners have demonstrated great resilience, commitment and dedication to progress and improve their lives whilst keeping in touch on-line.

The Albion Mill development was significantly impacted by Covid restrictions, which subsequently delayed the completion and handover of the building. This is now due to take place by the end of the November with services mobilised and commencing in the new year.

**PLACE:
Community
pride in a
vibrant place to
live and visit**

- 4. Connected communities
- 5. Safe and clean environment

This year we saw our communities come together and support each other as collectively we responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. Through our status as an Integration Area, we took part in a national research study 'Beyond Us & Them', conducted in partnership with the University of Kent. Researchers wanted to understand how Covid-19 is affecting feelings of togetherness and social cohesion. The findings showed that areas that have invested in programmes to support social integration and cohesion, like we have, are doing better in terms of relationships between people from different communities at this stage of the pandemic. Residents are twice as likely to volunteer to help others and people reported higher levels of trust and social connection.

In summer, we brought our recycled waste collection back in-house with staff transferring from Biffa into the Council and from August changed our

separated recycled waste collections. 60,000 new blue bins and reusable bags were delivered across the borough to help improve recycling rates as well as saving approximately £80,000 per month. This significant change was implemented during difficult circumstances with the Covid 19 pandemic affecting lead in times for the delivery of new bins and sacks. Prior to starting the new system, all households received three separate notifications about the bin changes, with additional advertising on our social media platforms.

Covid-19 has clearly had a significant impact on our cultural offer and many of our planned events and festivals for 2020, have sadly been cancelled. However, we have been creative in our celebrations, holding award ceremonies virtually, socially distanced street parties for VE day and most recently the stunning light display on Blackburn Town Hall as part of our Remembrance commemorations.

We have also been pleased to hold our first drive-in movie screening at Witton Park in July and again at the end of October.

At the end of September 1,789 residents were signed up to support Council services. However, volunteering activity has been limited due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the closure of Libraries, Children Centres and Community Centres. To support our response to the pandemic 58 Telephone befrienders have supported 61 residents with weekly wellbeing calls and a further 113 volunteers have been on hand to support food delivery and prescription collection.

Our Libraries, cultural and heritage services have supported the local covid-19 response in a number of different ways to keep people and communities connected. Throughout the lockdown, we continued home deliveries to our most vulnerable customers and operating a click-and-collect service to all users. This has led to an increase in uptake of our e-reading with 65% increase in registration; 82% increase in e-book loans and a 68% increase in e-magazines.

Our Arts and Museums service also moved online, including our Paint the Town programme, which had 40 entrants; and a series of artist and writer residencies focussed on artists living and working in their own community. The Kick Down the Barriers exhibition at Blackburn Museum was launched in September with a two month long exhibition showcasing the work of local artists that have been working in the communities of Blackburn to redefine the labels of 'segregation' and 'division'. Unfortunately, the second national lockdown paused the exhibition but we are pleased to be able to extend the exhibition into January.

The Bureau and Festival of Light set up their work and workshops online as did the Friends of the Museum who have done a weekly zoom talk since March. The exhibition programme also went online and opened physically in July, all Turton Tower content is virtual.

We have also delivered phase 1 of the Witton Park to Blackburn Town Centre "Stride and Ride Corridor" providing a permanent safe walking/cycling route from the park to the town. The project, funded by the first tranche of the Department for Transport's Emergency Active Travel Fund, aims to build on our residents' desire to get out in the Borough to

	<p>walk and cycle in order to make sustainable transport journeys as part of healthier lifestyles. It will encourage and promote safer walking and cycling for the last 2 miles of the daily commute for students and workers through a mix of permanent cycle lanes, thermoplastic signage, and the use of bolt down separation. The Council has worked with schools along the corridor and Blackburn College to promote the scheme, which gives a great opportunity to encourage safer walking and cycling, reduce traffic and increase road safety.</p>
<p>ECONOMY: A strong and inclusive economy with continued growth</p> <p>6. Strong, growing economy to enable social mobility</p> <p>7. Supporting our town centres and businesses</p>	<p>In July, we were pleased that the Darwen Town Deal was awarded £750,000 for 'quick win' projects to help accelerate regeneration schemes in the town. The Darwen Town Deal Board is developing the business case needed for the Town Deal; early ideas for projects include restoring Darwen Tower and investing in the facilities at Darwen Football club, as well as developing Junction 4 skate park for the town's young people.</p> <p>Our Adult Learning programmes have continued offering virtual courses and face-to-face in our covid-secure centres. Thanks to Tesco Mobile, we have also been able to offer a free SIM card to those who want to join our online courses but do not have sufficient data.</p> <p>Construction works to the final Local Growth Fund 3 scheme at South East Blackburn recommenced in July, work had been paused due to the national lockdown. The widening of Haslingden Road is advancing on the section between Lions Drive and Shadsworth Road with works so far focussing on utility diversions and excavations, which will enable the construction of the widened carriageway. Hospital Barn buildings at Old Bank Lane have been demolished to enable the construction of the new Royal Blackburn Hospital roundabout entrance, with the boundary stone wall now removed. The line of the new link road between Roman Road and Guide is also now visible, with drainage and swale construction works progressing well. The project will improve congestion, improve air quality and pedestrian facilities, and enable further development of employment and housing opportunities in the South East Blackburn area.</p> <p>The opening of Carl Fogarty Way last year has delivered the final phase of the Furthergate and Burnley Road Link Road project. The scheme will unlock land to enable the future development of new employment opportunities identified within the Council's adopted Local Plan and will improve access to and from the Town Centre and M65 Junction 6. Traffic conditions will change on Burnley Road and conditions have been improved. It is now quieter for residents, with associated improvements experienced for road safety, congestion and air quality.</p> <p>The North Blackburn scheme substantially completed in March 2020. Junctions at Brownhill Roundabout, Pleckgate Road, Whalley Old Road, and Emerald Avenue all upgraded with the latest signals technology, which has significantly increased highways capacity and has improved associated road safety for pedestrians and cyclists. The scheme supports adjacent housing development in the North Blackburn area.</p> <p>The Victoria Street / Northgate Link Road scheme substantially completed in October 2020. This includes better accessibility to local businesses, more on-street parking, public realm works at Blakey Moor and improved conditions for pedestrians and cyclists.</p>

	<p>Our Hive network has kept businesses informed on Covid-19 guidance and business support measures and, whilst unfortunately the Hive awards this year have been cancelled, we have recorded a short video recognising the local businesses who have gone 'above and beyond' at a time of national crisis.</p>
<p>COUNCIL: Delivered by a strong and resilient council</p> <p>8. Transparent and effective organisation</p>	<p>This year has undoubtedly seen one of the fastest transitions to on-line and virtual services across the public sector. Overall we have seen a 70% increase in contact, across all channels, compared to 2019. In particular, we have seen an increase in demand for online Chat services. In April, we launched our customer portal, which has received 45,000 service requests and has over 20,000 registered users.</p> <p>Hundreds of residents have signed up to be part of our new Customer Panel in 2020, which will help us to design and tailor our online services going forward.</p> <p>We have increased resilience for services in 2020 by providing enhanced IT connections and capacity, enabling our staff to work anywhere. This has resulted in over 70% of council staff connected remotely at any one time during the pandemic and enabled services like contact tracing and the help hub to operate in any location. The introduction of Microsoft 365 and Teams has enabled over 400 virtual meetings per day for staff, reducing travel, saving time and money as well as contributing to our carbon efficiency targets. The use of Microsoft Teams in particular has enabled rapid collaboration between our own teams and with our partners, throughout the pandemic.</p> <p>During 2020, we have developed an online business intelligence platform. This has enabled us to provide a live Covid-19 dashboard to officers and elected members, which we have adapted through the different phases of government interventions. Internally, we have also started to develop dashboards to give us deeper insights into areas such as workforce and customer contact channels.</p> <p>We have a dedicated Covid-19 section on our website providing a range of information including support available to businesses, Help Hub, local data and details on local restrictions. We have seen a 50% increase of traffic across the whole website based on the same period last year.</p> <p>Our commitment to apprenticeships continues and this year we had our highest number of applicants yet at 291. We sent out a stage one assessment to which we received 181 returns and all were invited for interview. We have successfully recruited 21 new apprentices across a range of council services to join our existing cohort of second year apprentices.</p> <p>This year we have seen a reduction in our carbon emissions, largely as a consequence of building closures and service reductions. Some sites have however increased energy consumption, often due to extended operating hours or covid-19 compliant ventilation requirements.</p>

5. MANAGING OUR PERFORMANCE

There are 73 measures within the Corporate performance framework linked to the Council's eight strategic priorities. Appended to the report are the performance measures for the period April to September 2020 and an exception report for measures that are considered to be under performing.

Since early March, the Council has been responding to the emergencies of the Coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, in some instances we have not been able to report data for all of the 73 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Our response to the pandemic has had a profound effect on our council finances and is reflected across Local Government throughout the country.

Despite persistent financial challenges the Council has responded quickly and successfully to put in place, all of the new measures and guidance expected by the Government and in particular to support our most vulnerable residents. This is testament to the fantastic efforts of our workforce. As of November 13th, we have received 54 compliments during the covid-19 lockdown period complementing our services and efforts during this crises.

Our staff have worked tirelessly over the wide range of services in response to Covid-19. Including:

- Our Help Hub has supported 3,937 vulnerable people
- We have had 124,757 online customer transactions and forms completed, with 104,015 Social Media link clicks.
- The local authority has issued c.£43.5m in business grants. We also host regular online local business support sessions and facilitate sessions with council officers, lenders and local business experts.

Each portfolio has allocated a red, amber or green forecast to the measures that they own. Information for the period is as follows:

- 3% (2 actual) have been forecast as "red" where performance is, or is likely to be off track. Further detail is provided in appendix 2.
- 25% (18 actual) have been forecast "amber" where delivery is on track and currently being managed.
- 52% (38 actual) have been forecast "green" or on track.
- 20% (15 actual) these measures have not been RAG rated as data is unavailable this may be due to services being closed or paused due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

The State of the Borough dashboard provides a general snap shot of how the borough performs on each of the corporate plan strategic themes; Place, People, Economy and provide some basic population data. A copy of the dashboard is available on the Council website <https://www.blackburn.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/pdfs/Borough-outcome-measures.pdf>.

A number of the indicators presented provide data for over a twelve-month period, so many of the recent challenges facing the borough as a result of the covid-19 pandemic will not be clearly seen. However, they still do provide a summary of the boroughs' key characteristics.

Economic activity of residents remains below regional and national averages, as does the employment rate, although the gap between regional and national averages has narrowed in recent years. Productivity, as measured by Gross Value Added per hour worked, is the lowest of

the local authorities in the Lancashire LEP area. However, the borough is home to around 10% of the employee jobs in the Lancashire LEP area and contributes 9.2% of the enterprises in Lancashire LEP.

Over the last twelve months the loss of residents due to people moving out of the borough to other areas in the UK has reduced, which is reflected in a modest increase in overall population. The number of properties in the borough has increased over the last 12 months and 37% of new homes built in 2019/20 were on brownfield land. Overall, average house prices in the borough have remained relatively stable with a slight increase in the number of homes sold in the 2019/2020 financial year, compared to the previous year. However, data for the current financial year to date does reflect a depressed housing market due to the impact of covid-19.

Recorded crime data for the twelve month period to June 2020 does include a proportion of time impacted by covid-19. Overall there had been a -12% decrease in recorded crime compared to the previous year (-16% in Lancashire as a whole).

Life expectancy of residents remains lower than regional and national averages and the borough has some of the highest levels of five year olds having had teeth extracted due to dental decay. School performance in the borough remains mixed, with some schools performing consistently above national averages. Due to the covid-19 pandemic, data for the 2019/20 academic year will not be released.

6. EQUALITY

Under the Equality Act 2010, we are bound by the Public Sector Equality Duty to integrate consideration of equality and good relations into our day-to-day business. Since the COVID-19 outbreak we have had to make significant changes to the way we deliver our services and this has had an impact on our residents and workforce.

An equality impact assessment (EIA) has been undertaken to capture the impact of the pandemic on our residents and staff and the actions we have undertaken to mitigate these impacts where possible. The EIA is a 'live' document as the situation is changing constantly and it requires individual departments to share their actions and responses with the Policy & Research team to ensure that all activity is documented.

Understandably, the EIA identifies that there has been significant negative impact on all the protected characteristics and the additional categories of *carers* and *vulnerable groups*, which the Council includes in all EIAs. This impact ranges from disruption to day services and the impact of this on older residents' mental and physical health to an increased risk of mortality to BAME residents from contracting the virus.

In addition, the EIA has helped us to recognise that there are many residents who fall into multiple protected characteristic categories and the cumulative impact this has had on them. As we continue our response to the challenges the pandemic is creating, the EIA is a helpful tool to both identify and implement mitigating actions for our residents and staff. We are working closely with our Lancashire Resilience Forum partners to share learning and good practice across the equality agenda.

7. NEXT 12 MONTHS FOR THE COUNCIL

Covid-19 continued response

Covid-19 will continue to be a significant focus for the Council over the next 12 months. Whilst we welcome news of progress towards a vaccine, we recognise that coronavirus will be part of life for the foreseeable future. We are in a strong position to continue our response. Our services are already well adapted, our workforce is flexible and our partnerships are strong.

Our business plans and performance framework is in place to keep us on track, we have strong governance with democratic oversight of our response, and we have a number of covid-specific strategies to support our response. Our Covid Core Team reports directly to the Chief Executive, co-ordinating our response. Our bespoke Covid Response Plan is underpinned by:

- **Local Outbreak Management Plan:** This plan guides our response to local outbreaks based on seven themes – planning for local outbreaks in care homes and schools; identifying and planning how to manage other high-risk places; methods for local testing; contact tracing; integrating national and local data; supporting vulnerable people to self-isolate; establishing governance. We have established a Blackburn with Darwen Covid-19 Health Protection Board to oversee management of local outbreaks.
- **Covid Test and Trace Strategy:** Our strategy is based around three core principles – containing outbreaks through testing and the use of data; accessible local testing; functioning local trace system.
- **Covid Enforcement Strategy:** Our strategy is based around three core principles – prevention and engagement; use of intelligence; enforcement action.
- **Covid Communications and Community Engagement Strategy:** Our strategy is based around three core principles – how we are communicating; local engagement; targeted community engagement.
- **Covid Workplace Well-being Strategy:** Our strategy is based around three main principles – improved employee morale and engagement; a healthier and more inclusive workforce and culture; lower sickness absence.

Financial position

We have continued to work hard over the period to process and administer a range of financial support packages for businesses and residents across the borough:

- We have distributed over £42million in Business Rate and Discretionary Grants to businesses, through the first tranche of Business Rate grants introduced by government in April. We are now working on the distribution of the second tranche of these grants following the implementation of our Tier 3 local restrictions and more latterly, the second national lockdown.
- Following the council's role as a pilot site, we are now delivering the government's Test and Trace Support Payment scheme to help people on low incomes to self-isolate when they test positive or are identified as a Covid-19 contact, and to encourage more people to be tested. This is intended to reduce the transmission of the virus. Individuals who need to self-isolate, and who meet the benefits-related eligibility criteria, are entitled to a £500 payment.
- We have also continued to award the government's Hardship Fund by reducing the Council Tax bill by £150 for all individuals of working age who are in receipt of Council Tax Support.

- We continue to prioritise the processing of supplier invoices and provide daily supplier payment runs, as required, to ensure we get cash out as quickly as possible to all of our suppliers, particularly those in the care sector. Payment schedules have increased in terms of frequency to aid cash flow and facilitate payment in advance or immediate payment for some services.

We are facing significant financial pressures from the increased costs and losses of income due to the pandemic. Some of the additional financial pressures we are currently forecasting for the year, as reported in our latest monthly Covid-19 financial return to MHCLG, include:

- £7.252 million on Adult Social Care including the costs of PPE, the costs of setting up the food hub and associated costs to distribute food to shielded and vulnerable groups, providing support to the social care market and meeting the additional demand pressures arising due to Covid-19.
- £0.842 million on Children's Social Care, including the additional costs of care packages for extended placements due to the pandemic
- £1.367 million on testing, contract tracing and outbreak management
- £10.113 million in respect of the loss of sales, fees, charges and commercial income.

Work to collate both the actual costs incurred and the income lost due to Covid-19 has continued throughout the year, and we will continue to review and refine the assumptions on which the forecasts are based over the remainder of the financial year. The Revenue Monitoring Report approved by the Executive Board on 12th November 2020, noted a gross forecast overspend of £19.241 million for the year across all the portfolios due to the financial impact of Covid-19; this figure excluded the losses from Council Tax and Business Rates, which are currently forecast at £1.37 million and £7.925 million respectively.

The Government has provided several funding packages for local government over the course of the last 8 months. These have assisted in addressing the budget pressures noted above, and other specific costs incurred in responding to the crisis. To date we have received £15.03 million in general Covid-19 Grant funding.

Further financial support is to be made available to assist in meeting a proportion of the losses in respect of Sales, Fees and Charges based on a set of eligibility criteria issued by MHCLG. The first of these claims was completed at the end of September. Based on the work undertaken to forecast the total eligible losses under this scheme, we estimate that we should receive £5.75 million for the year. In respect of losses on Council Tax and Business Rates, the government has also passed legislation to provide for their recovery over a period of 3 years from 1st April 2021.

The size of the net 2020/21 forecast overspend due to Covid-19 has decreased significantly over the course of the financial year as the government has fed through various tranches of financial support to assist. We are however, very much mindful that our forecasts and assumptions are based on the information available at the current time; these may well change over the remainder of the year, dependant on the impact of the 2nd wave of the pandemic, the demand pressures over the course of the winter and given the possibility of a 3rd wave.

At the time of writing, we are awaiting the delivery of the Chancellor's Spending Review on 25th November. Unfortunately, due to the pressures of Covid-19, this will again only provide for a one-year settlement and will therefore frustrate and hinder our work to build our financial plans over the medium to longer term, but we will update further on this at Finance Council on 1st March 2021.

LOOKING FORWARD : THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

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

1. Supporting young people and raising aspirations
2. Safeguarding and supporting the most vulnerable people
3. Reducing health inequalities and improving health outcomes

We are anticipating rollout of the Covid-19 vaccination programme from December for our NHS front line workers and care settings, with mass vaccination to follow. We will be working with NHS colleagues and the LRF on delivery through a dedicated site and also mobile for those residents who need to be vaccinated in their own homes.

Over the next 12 months, we will develop a Leaving Care Strategy to reflect the wishes of care leavers and outline the offer for care leaver's post 18. We will also be refreshing the Corporate Parenting Strategy to reflect the wishes and feelings of children in care and continue to strengthen the work of the multi-agency Corporate Parenting Executive Board to raise awareness of need.

We will be undertaking work to further understand the impact of neglect and prevalence within the borough, and ensure that it is recognised early and effectively responded to in all areas of practice. We will be embedding the multi-agency approach to neglect and understanding of the Neglect Strategy and Action Plan through further engagement and training with staff and partners.

With key partners, we are establishing an Adolescent Panel to ensure that young people get the support they need as soon as possible. We will be developing an Adolescent Framework focussing on the needs and vulnerability of young people at risk of contextual and complex safeguarding.

It is crucial that all of our children have access to good quality and consistent education, even more so given the significant impact Covid-19 has had on schools and pupils. We are working with partners to embed the School Improvement Strategy providing proportionate, timely and additional support where risk factors are identified. This includes continuing to address challenges with lower performing schools; improving attainment and progress in Reading in vulnerable schools and identified schools in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2; and ensuring that the needs of SEND pupils are being fully met in each school with a curriculum that is challenging and ambitious for these children.

Executive Board in November agreed the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020-25 that details how we will tackle homelessness and rough sleeping over the next five years. The strategy is designed to help the Council and its partners to achieve aims that cross boundaries and address issues of health, social care and community safety. We will work with partners to deliver the objectives – prevention and relief of homelessness; limiting the use of B&B and increasing the provision of suitable temporary accommodation; tackling and reducing the levels of rough sleeping; addressing the over-supply of HMOs.

Our commissioning of prevention services is continuing with integrated sexual health service retender in March 2021 and the mobilisation of a new contract. We will continue to review and monitor all of our commissioned public health services.

We will continue to develop our mental wellbeing programme, including employee mental health and wellbeing; refresh our suicide prevention strategy and lead on implementing the local action plan. We will also be developing a strategic plan for child poverty with input for stakeholders

	<p>We will continue to work in collaboration and in partnership with our communities within the provider sector, voluntary community and faith sector and with NHS partners to transform and deliver the best services possible for our communities. We will continue to promote strength and asset based working, developing our volunteer offer, building community capacity and resilience.</p> <p>We will deliver early intervention and preventative services to support communities stay safe and well by building on the momentum of integrated teams and the Help Hub and linking to our vision for Primary Care Neighbourhoods and improving health and wellbeing. We will particularly be concentrating on the intermediate tier and social prescribing.</p> <p>We will continue to work in partnerships to protect our communities, particularly the most vulnerable by tackling crime, homelessness, mental ill health and multiple health conditions. We will take a place based and population health approach to providing joined up solutions with partners around the person.</p> <p>A core function of the Adults portfolio is to work with communities who face multiple disadvantage to improve work prospects and wellbeing. The impact of Covid has disproportionately affected our most disadvantaged.</p>
<p>PLACE: Community pride in a vibrant place to live and visit</p> <p>4. Connected communities</p> <p>5. Safe and clean environment</p>	<p>Our cultural offer has always been a key part of connecting our communities and we hope to welcome back those festivals and events that we have unfortunately had to cancel this year. We have already a range of shows and events scheduled at King George’s Hall and Darwen Library Theatre next year and hope these are able to go ahead.</p> <p>We hope to welcome back some our fantastic festivals and events throughout 2021, in particular the Festival of Making, British Textile Biennial Festival, Darwen Music Live.</p> <p>The council will continue to work with partners to promote cohesion and social integration and we will continue to campaign and influence national policies to address issues of hate, domestic violence and extremism.</p> <p>The Walking and Cycling Project team are on a mission to make walking and cycling the first and easiest choice of travel for short trips across the region. Covid-19 has certainly raised the profile of active travel and how that agenda links into our Public Health and climate change targets. Within our transport planning we are looking at a greater emphasis on walking and cycling accessibility improvements and putting a greater emphasis when we are negotiating our s106 developer contributions. With increased demand for walking and cycling, both for recreation and travel to work activities, we are looking at capacity for cycling on major routes and will deliver infrastructure changes through the DfT active travel funding.</p> <p>The highways service place great emphasis on the carbon footprint of their operations and consider low carbon solutions within their road improvement programme. Through surface dressing, spray injection patching and use of low temperature tarmacs the carbon footprint can be reduced whilst still delivering on the improvements required on the road network.</p>

	<p>Over the next 12 months, we will aim to increase recycling rates by 4%, plus aim to reduce from the previous year, the amount of waste disposed of at landfill and more by energy from waste treatment. We will do this via a communications campaign and management of contamination in the recycling bins.</p> <p>We will review and revise the enforcement and regulatory operations we conduct, with the Covid 19 pandemic seeing the introduction of new legislation that takes precedent within our priorities in addition to a the review of other enforcement and regulatory activities. It is crucial that we do not overstretch the work we are statutorily obliged to undertake, without having due regard to the Council priorities and the capacity of the regulatory and enforcement services themselves.</p>
<p>ECONOMY: A strong and inclusive economy with continued growth</p> <p>6. Strong, growing economy to enable social mobility</p> <p>7. Supporting our town centres and businesses</p>	<p>We recognise that local businesses, workers, self-employed are significantly affected by Covid-19 both by the forced closure of businesses due to restrictions and reduced demand for those that have been able to remain open. Economic recovery will be difficult nationally and we will continue to lobby the Government to ensure Blackburn with Darwen businesses have access to the right funds when needed, and to promote future growth.</p> <p>In September, Executive Board agreed the Growth Programme for 2021, including feasibility, planning and delivery of housing, employment and strategic sites. A re-occupation of empty homes continues to be one of our priorities.</p> <p>Over the next 12 months, we will complete our Growth Deal 3 major transport schemes, with South East Blackburn completing in summer 2021. There will also be development related transport infrastructure schemes including North Blackburn and West Blackburn highways improvements. The Local Transport Plan also highlights a number of small to medium transport projects including walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure, in addition to capital maintenance schemes for highways and surfacing and structures.</p> <p>Our Darwen Town Deal Board has re-grouped and is making good progress in developing our proposal, incorporating ideas and views from local residents and businesses. We expect to submit this in January with up to £25m available to help kick-start the transformation of Darwen.</p> <p>In December, we are asking Executive Board to approve the draft new Local Plan which will then be available for public consultation from 8th January – 19th February 2021. We are obviously developing solutions for a covid-secure consultation. The Local Plan affects everyone who lives or works in the borough, and there will be a significant amount of communications from December onwards. The Local Plan will illustrate many benefits in terms of job growth, housing growth and environmental improvements.</p> <p>Our Blackburn with Darwen Employment and Skills Board have identified three main areas of concern as we respond to the long-term challenges and economic recovery of Covid-19. These are youth unemployment (16-24); the transition of older employees or recently redundant employees to emerging employment opportunities, specifically the over 50s; and the need for locally led opportunities to help our residents gain the required skills to successfully find work post pandemic.</p>

	<p>We will continue to engage with the LEP and Lancashire colleagues as we plan our collective economic recovery. Senior officers are engaged in the Lancashire Economic Development Group to take work forward.</p>
<p>COUNCIL: Delivered by a strong and resilient council</p> <p>8. Transparent and effective organisation</p>	<p>The census for England and Wales will take place on 21st March 2021 and in light of Covid-19, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) have refined their planning to ensure that everyone can provide their information safely and securely. Our data is regularly updated to ensure that any new addresses in the borough will receive a census questionnaire. We will work with the Census Engagement Manager to identify groups or communities that may need additional support in completing the census. Our libraries service will also deliver a census support service to help those who need additional support to get online to complete their census digitally.</p> <p>Our workforce have worked incredibly hard over the last nine months and we will continue to ensure we respond to any workforce implications of covid-19. It is crucial that all of our employees are able to work and feel safe in a covid-secure environment, we will continue to update our advice and guidance to all settings on workforce, and health and safety related issues. As services respond to the introduction and lifting of restrictions, our workforce will remain, flexible and adaptable so that we can provide appropriately experienced and skills employees to support the Council's response to Covid-19, including mutual aid support through the LRF. In order to do this, we need to increase resilience and wellbeing in the workplace and reduce sickness absence.</p> <p>We are starting a programme of transformation and savings with a turnaround team set up to redesign processes to unlock further efficiencies, increase online customer journeys as well as leveraging advanced technologies in the Care sector.</p>

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no additional policy implications. The proposed activity over the next 12 months will strengthen existing policies.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no additional financial implications. Activity will be managed within department existing budgets.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications.

10. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no additional resource implications. Activity will be managed within existing resources.

11. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

An equality impact assessment for this Policy Council report is not necessary.

Please see the information within the report regarding the Equality Impact Assessment for our response to Covid-19.

12. CONSULTATIONS

There are no consultations.

Chief Officer

Contact Officer: Denise Park, Chief Executive

Date: 24/11/2020