



REPORT OF:	LEADER
TO:	POLICY COUNCIL
DATE:	2 DECEMBER 2021

Delivering through the Covid-19 pandemic and looking towards the future

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- To outline the key national and local policy challenges and proposals
- Reflect on the Council's performance over the last year
- Look ahead to next year, including plans for a major programme of engagement with residents, businesses and partners
- Endorse the bid for city status for Blackburn
- Update on plans for a Covid-19 memorial for the borough

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Policy Council:

- Note the report
- Note the performance of the Council for the first six months of 2021/22 (1 April to 30 September 2021)
- Note the plans for engagement over the next six months
- Endorse the submission of the bid for city status for Blackburn on December 8
- Note plans for a Covid-19 memorial for the borough

3. SUMMARY

The last two years have been incredibly challenging for the whole borough, for our residents and businesses as well as the Council and its partners. Blackburn with Darwen has been one of the worst affected areas by Covid-19 due to the long-term structural, social and health inequalities that already exist.

Despite the challenges, the borough has responded exceptionally well with the whole community playing their part – following guidance, getting vaccinated, getting tested, looking after each other and showing resilience.

At the time of writing, the case rate locally has been below the national average for some time, and while this winter is set to be challenging, especially for the NHS and the wider

health and care sector, Blackburn with Darwen is in a much better position than it was last year.

Throughout the pandemic, the Council, its members and staff have continued to show leadership, working with our partners, communities and volunteers, in the fight against the virus.

Council staff have continued to deliver for the borough despite the enormous challenges the pandemic has presented.

The Corporate Plan 2019-2023 was endorsed in 2019 but even though Covid-19 has had a huge impact on the organisation, we have still performed well as shown by the latest performance report.

The impact of Covid will continue to be felt for some time but we are returning to more business as usual and can now concentrate more fully on the policy agendas that will support sustained recovery, drive improvements in services and make the borough a better place for residents and businesses. These policy areas and priorities will be shaped by the national policy picture including the government's Levelling Up agenda.

The Council is also proposing to engage with residents, businesses and partners over the next six months to facilitate discussions to shape the Council's future priorities and a vision for the borough post-pandemic.

Given the Corporate Plan was endorsed pre-pandemic, it is important we look at refreshing it to take into account the impact of Covid.

This robust engagement, detailed later in the report, will form the evidence base for a new Corporate Plan for 2022-2026 and help determine the Council's strategic priorities for the next four years.

4. NATIONAL POLICY IMPACTS

Covid-19 has dominated national policy throughout the last year but, following the completion of the roadmap out of lockdown, and as both national and local government return to more business as usual, attention and focus has turned back onto the big policy agendas the current Government hopes to deliver.

4.1 Devolution

A key focus of the current Government has been the Levelling Up agenda. The Government announced its intention in the Queen's Speech to introduce a Levelling Up White Paper. At the time of writing, the white paper has yet to be published and the current expectation is that it will be published before the end of the calendar year, although that remains uncertain.

The Government has indicated that the white paper will build on actions it is already taking to level up across the UK.

These actions include programmes such as town deals, the community renewal fund and the proposed 'county deals' programme, including potential for more devolution.

Blackburn with Darwen Council has a good track record of successful bids. Our Darwen Town Board has successfully secured £25m from Government to kick start the transformation of the town. Two projects, namely the Blackburn with Darwen Low Carbon Technologies Business Support and Skills Academy and the Pennine Lancashire Linear Park Pilot were successful as part of the bid to the Community Renewal Fund.

Lancashire leaders have been in discussions about working together more closely over recent months to develop proposals to secure the powers, funding and flexibilities we need to deliver real improvements for the residents of the whole county and help us address the issues and inequalities which Covid brought into sharp relief. These discussions are ongoing and further updates will be provided to Council in due course.

4.2 Budget

In October, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the Autumn Budget Statement which included information on the Spending Review 2021.

The Budget included various announcements about investments to deal with backlogs in health, education and the criminal justice system as a result of the pandemic, some funding to support individuals such as changes to the Universal Credit taper rate, an increase in the National Living Wage and additional funding to tackle homelessness. However, other funding which had been in place through the pandemic, such as the uplift to Universal Credit and the furlough scheme has now ended. In addition the planned rise in National Insurance contributions next April will also impact on businesses and many residents in the borough.

The spending review announced departmental spending totals for each Government department each year to 2024/25. For local government, this includes additional grant funding of £1.6bn for Councils in each year over the next three years, however the additional funding will have to cover significant cost increases including increases to National Insurance, the National Living Wage and rising inflation affecting other costs such as energy. The Council Tax increase threshold is expected to remain at 2% with the Government expecting upper tier local authorities to raise further funding through an additional social care precept of 1% per year. The budget also reaffirms £5.4bn to fund reforms to the adult social care sector. The sector is currently awaiting the white paper on social care reform to understand the full implications of this in the context of the resources available.

As well as announcing details of the successful bids to the first round of the Levelling Up Fund (totalling £1.7bn), the Government also set out the amount of funding available for further rounds (a further £3.1bn), although timescales for the next round of bids, for which we are working on proposals for Blackburn, remain unclear. The budget also provided some information on the funding available through the planned UK Shared Prosperity Fund (the successor to EU funding programmes). Both the Levelling Up Fund and UK Shared Prosperity Fund (along with other bid-based monies such as the Towns Fund) are intended to support the Government's approach to levelling up; we would hope to see more detailed information in the anticipated Levelling Up White Paper.

While the spending review appears relatively more positive for local government finance than we anticipated, the actual local government settlement, including distribution methodologies to local authorities, will not be announced until later this month.

4.3 Health and social care changes

In February 2021 the Government published a white paper outlining how the NHS in England needs to change to enable health and care to work more closely together. The Health and Social Care Bill is currently going through Parliament.

It has long been our aspiration to improve the way services work together and to be excellent partners to each other, but bureaucracy has sometimes got in the way.

The proposals are designed to be flexible and will allow our health and care system to continue to evolve in a way which best suits us locally. It is recognised that the bill does not address adult social care or public health reforms, which will be critical to ensure ambitions for integrated care are achieved, proposals for these areas are expected later in the year.

Members are encouraged to read a more detailed update on health and care reform and its local context contained in a report to October's Executive Board.

4.4 Environment Act and COP26

The Environment Act 2021 received Royal Assent in November. The act creates powerful new laws to protect and enhance the environment. It is a wide-ranging and important piece of legislation. It delivers long term targets to reduce waste and improve resource efficiency, as well as improve air quality, biodiversity, and water. The Act also introduces the Office for Environmental Protection, which will be a new public body to hold government and public authorities to account.

Other outcomes of the act include extending producer responsibility to make producers pay for 100% of the cost of disposal of products, starting with plastic packaging, a deposit return scheme for single use drinks containers, greater consistency in recycling collections in England and electronic waste tracking to monitor waste movements and tackle fly-tipping.

The Act became law during the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow during October and November. COP26 brought parties together from across the world to accelerate action on climate change.

As a Council, we take our responsibilities to the environment and efforts to tackle climate change extremely seriously. We have declared a climate emergency and helping tackle the emergency will be a major priority for our Council. An update on our plans will be provided in the new year.

5. "DELIVERING FOR YOU" – HIGHLIGHTS AND PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE CORPORATE PLAN

A central theme over the last year has been how the Council, its staff and members have risen to the challenges presented by the pandemic while still delivering for our residents and businesses.

As members will be aware, the Council has received national recognition through being shortlisted and commended in a number of prestigious awards and our Covid-19 response has received praise from the highest levels of government.

While our performance data has inevitably been affected by Covid, it is pleasing to note that we are still on track for meeting the vast majority of our targets.

5.1 Managing our performance

There are 70 measures within the corporate performance framework linked to the Council's eight strategic priorities. Since early March 2020, 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 70 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). However, where possible, they still provide a summary of the borough's key characteristics.

Policy Council is asked to note the overall performance against the delivery of the Council's strategic objectives as illustrated in Appendix One Performance, and the remedial action to improve delivery against the 2019-2023 corporate priorities which are giving cause for concern, as outlined in Appendix Two exception reports. Appendix Three outlines a high level summary of our performance.

Each portfolio has been asked to provide a red, amber or green forecast for their performance measures. Information relating to the 70 KPIs for the first half-year of 2021/22 (April 2021 to September 2021) is as follows:

- 3% (2 actual) forecast "red" where performance is, or is likely to be off track
- 32% (22 actual) forecast "amber" where delivery is on track and currently being managed
- 53% (37 actual) forecast "green" or on track
- 12% (9 actual) of the measures' data and/or a RAG rating is currently unavailable

5.2 Reflections on the last 12 months

The table below reflects on some of our activity over the last 12 months while recognising the impact of Covid-19 on council services. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list. Highlights of council activity are published frequently through our online news outlet – The Shuttle and shared with local, regional and national media.

PEOPLE:

Children's Services and Education teams have remained resilient throughout Covid, continuing to offer safe face-to-face services as

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

required. As restrictions have eased, we have responded in a way that prioritises children's welfare and allows for effective working with families in line with statutory guidance and legislation.

Throughout Covid we've worked to ensure families receive the right support at the right time by increasing the input of social work interventions where needed, and working closely with partners. We have analysed how Covid has impacted on care proceedings and the overall impact on staff welfare and absence to inform our forward planning and recovery.

An LGA Peer Review in June 2021 confirmed that our staff should be commended for their ongoing work with children and families. As well as many areas to be proud of and build on, development opportunities were identified which have already been incorporated into our business plans.

Our new Corporate Parenting Strategy has also been co-produced and launched, with clearer expectations from our cared for children and care leavers about what they need from us.

When the second lockdown was announced in January 2021, all schools and settings moved to remote learning, whilst remaining open to vulnerable children and the children of key workers. Following the second lifting of lockdown in March 2021, they were opened fully to children and young people. The Education Response team continued to work to ensure they were safe. An updated risk assessment was arranged for schools to adopt before the wider opening that was in line with Department for Education (DfE) operational guidance for schools and settings. Schools continued to work with the Education response team in dealing with positive case management. To date we have had no school or settings closure this academic year.

During the first half term of this academic year attendance in the borough remained above the national average and consistently one of the highest in the region. Attendance for our children and young people with an Education and Health Care plan was higher than national average, and children and young people with a social worker remained at or slightly higher than national average. These attendance figures are testament to the work of council officers, and our schools and settings staff.

Our Education, Schools and SEND teams within the Council have continued business as usual throughout this year. This has ensured a quality and directed service providing the right support to our schools, children, young people and families. Our school improvement strategy remains an important element of our work.

The Holiday and Food 2021 programme aimed to offer valuable support to families on lower incomes, through access to rewarding activities alongside healthy meals. Blackburn with Darwen's initial allocation was

£735,610 which was used to provide free holiday clubs for school-aged children eligible for benefits-related Free School Meals. 4,405 children and young people accessed face to face activity, 56,630 meals were provided with 21 community venues used to deliver activities. We will be delivering services again during the Christmas 2021 holidays.

Despite the very tough circumstances of the past 12 months, staff, volunteers and frontline workers from across adult social care, prevention, neighbourhoods and community safety have gone above and beyond to continue delivering personal, community-focussed work with residents that has made a real difference to lives.

Our Neighbourhoods Teams have continued to staff our Help Hub, providing advice and support on a range of issues to residents affected by the pandemic, and residents in need in the borough. Between January and October 2021, the Help Hub team responded to 1,597 requests for support, with food, utilities and wellbeing being the most common needs identified. 32% of callers lived alone, 45% with children and 34% were isolating at the time they made the call.

Reablement and Home First teams have been at the forefront of the response to the Covid 19 pandemic. These services have collectively worked across seven days, providing the consistent levels of care that local people have required despite the significant challenges. The services have also supported the wider care sector at times of need and crisis.

The last 12 months have seen a significant focus on further developing the four Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs) to ensure local people are being offered the best possible health, care and community support available to help them be healthy, well and independent in their homes and communities. We have recently seen a significant rise in the number of referrals into the INTs, on average this equates to 220 referrals each month.

Housing pods were reinstalled in November. The pods, which offer emergency accommodation for those who might find themselves with nowhere to live, will be in place until March 2022. They come with a full wraparound support service 24hrs a day, with help available for people to improve their circumstances.

Day services are now back up and running and looking forward will continue to increase capacity across all sites, in line with national guidelines, as a means to increase the numbers of residents using services in a safe and planned way. Short breaks services continue to develop with a view to supporting residents with more complex needs and our Shared Lives service currently supports 36 residents within permanent placements.

The Our Community, Our Future programme resumed in 2021 with successful programmes delivered by our partners in the VCFS sector and successful small grant allocations.

Throughout the pandemic the Covid Community Champions were able to share important messaging with their friends, family, workplace contacts and wider social networks. In addition, Neighbourhood Teams made contact with 700 residents (April to October 2021) who were identified as needing support to isolate via national Test & Trace team members. The Refresh team also adapted physical activity delivery throughout varying levels of restrictions ensuring everyone, in particular those who are vulnerable or shielding, had access to support to be active. From July, the Health Trainers also became actively involved with local contact tracing. The service received 3,070 contacts in 2020-21. The Wellbeing Service has also continued to work with residents to improve their health. During the first half of the year, 3,995 contacts were received. The Adult Learning teams have delivered Mental Health First Aid courses across the borough. They have also offered support to residents experiencing long Covid via the formation of a long Covid support group.

Moving more and being active have been key public health messages over the last year. Leisure Centres were able to re-open their doors at the beginning of the summer and have welcomed over 4,500 members back into our fitness facilities (75% of pre Covid numbers) whilst also welcoming back school swimming, families and community groups.

Additional resource accessed through the Sport England funded Together an Active Future project has supported local organisations to support and connect with those people who have found the lockdown periods especially challenging. Reaching out using digital channels or through socially distanced activities has proved important for mental wellbeing, resilience and physical health recovery. Over the last 12 months there has been exciting usage of the extensive facilities in Witton Park, including the greenhouses. The Council, alongside a range of partners and volunteers, are working together to develop an expanding hub of outdoor activities to increase access, including creative football, green gym, cycling, walking and gardening.

Expanding the increasing range of community activities, the Bureau centre for the arts has been successful in securing funding for a creative social prescribing programme and hub which is bringing people together from across the borough.

The Public Health team has continued to provide vital support for the borough's response to, and recovery from, Covid - including testing and vaccination programmes. Since early August, Blackburn with Darwen has been in the lowest quartile (25%) of local authorities in England for Covid rates.

The team has also engaged in many other programmes and priorities focussed on reducing health inequalities and improving health outcomes. A new innovative sexual health service for the borough was launched in April. Commissioned by the Council on behalf of residents and delivered by sexual health charity Brook and partners, the new provision has given residents access to a 24/7 digital service through which they can manage their sexual health.

The 5 Ways to Wellbeing were put front and centre of a successful summer campaign highlighting health and wellbeing opportunities locally. The programme saw us working with partners and using the 5 Ways for 5 weeks to promote various local services and activities designed to make people feel good and function well.

Smoking harms were highlighted during a programme promoting the benefits of giving up which also signposted people to local areas of support.

In June, we marked Breastfeeding Celebration week across the borough. Our partnership to develop a breastfeeding friendly borough was recognised nationally when it was highly commended at the recent Local Government Chronicle awards.

Vigils were held in Blackburn and Darwen town centres to mark World Suicide Prevention Day. The multi-faith events involved speeches from Councillors, faith representatives, volunteers and those whose lives have been impacted by suicide and aimed to amplify an ongoing programme of events, activities, training opportunities and suicide awareness raising locally.

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

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

The introduction of the new blue bins for clean paper and cardboard last year has seen the quality of the material being recycled improve significantly. Previously, the contamination level in the blended recycling bin was over 30%, meaning that a large quantity of the material being placed in the recycling bin couldn't be recycled. Since the introduction of the blue bin, the contamination level has reduced to between 14% and 18%. The market rates for recycling materials varies on a monthly basis. In September 2021, the Council received an income for the recycling materials for the first time which was in excess of the cost of the recycling processing for the previous four months.

The 2021/22 Local Transport Plan (LTP) annual improvements programme was approved at Executive Board in June 2021 and included a range of highway improvement projects including road resurfacing and surface treatments, bridges and structures, road safety and improvements to traffic signals, drainage, street lighting and cycle routes. This programme is substantially completed, delivering significant improvements to our highways and associated infrastructure.

Our libraries and museums have offered virtual resources and access to archive information and online resources throughout the last 12 months and at times when Covid restrictions have prevented physical access to books, exhibitions and community history. This digital approach has seen increased borrowing of e-books and more virtual visits to see the contents of the museum and Turton Tower.

With focus placed on digital completion of the Census for England and Wales 2021, the library service, along with the Adult Learning Team, were able to offer face to face support and access to onsite IT facilities for independent use via a booking system at Blackburn Library, Darwen Library and Audley and Queens Park Neighbourhood Learning Centres. Uptake of these services was high in comparison to other areas in the region.

King George's Hall (KGH) and Darwen Library Theatre (DLT) were the last public buildings to re-open following the extensive restrictions. Confidence of younger audiences is growing with mainstream entertainment and ticket sales showing resilience. However, this is not the case for all shows with those aimed at the older generation fairing less well. Work will continue to secure customer confidence and encourage everyone safely back.

It was exciting this year to see the return of the borough's popular cultural and music festivals. Over the summer the Council worked with partners to bring a Luminarium to Corporation Park which attracted over 20,000 visitors. Other highlights were the excellent British Textile Biennale, with events and exhibitions across the borough in October, and the annual lantern parade in December. Witton Park has been host to a range of large open air events since the summer from Restricted Rocks and the Easter Fairs to Park Run and the Town Bonfire.

The fabulous setting of historic Turton Tower is now licenced as a marriage venue and hosted its first wedding this summer. The Grade 1 building has undergone significant building works, which are now complete and will open fully in March 2022 with the new season. In the meantime a successful heritage fund bid has meant that the volunteers have received training and a programme of events is planned.

**ECONOMY:
A strong and
inclusive
economy with
continued
growth**

6. Strong, growing economy to enable social mobility
7. Supporting our town centres and businesses

The completion of the final project within the Growth Deal 3 'Pennine Gateways' programme of infrastructure improvements, the South East Blackburn Growth Deal Major Transport Scheme, will complete and open in December 2021. This project includes the widening of Haslingden Road in the vicinity of the Royal Blackburn Hospital, and the provision of a new Link Road, 'Issa Way', from Blackmoor Road to Roman Road creating access and opportunity to develop the land around Fishmoor Reservoir. This is the final project to be completed from the Growth Deal 3 funding which also included the major infrastructure improvements at Carl Fogarty Way, Brownhill Roundabout, Pleckgate Road, Whalley Old Road and Four Lane Ends.

With doors closed to public buildings for part of the year services continued to innovate. KGH was transformed into a Smart Testing site for 76 days playing a crucial role in the borough's Covid response plan, supporting businesses and employees to keep workplaces and services open, identify infections early and reducing transmission of Covid-19.

In 2020/21, 421 new homes were completed across the borough and 176 long-term empty properties were brought back into re-occupation. New family homes were completed on a number of housing sites across the Borough including large sites such as Gib Lane, Roe Lee and Yew Tree Drive in Blackburn and Pole Lane in Darwen.

The new eight screen Reel Cinema opened in Spring 2021 which is a fantastic addition to Blackburn and is at the heart of the town centre's Northgate regeneration scheme. The state-of-the-art entertainment facility also includes a retail outlet and under-croft parking for customers and local shoppers. A new statue of the late Baroness Castle of Blackburn was unveiled in October 2021 in our new Jubilee Square.

The completed Millbank Road opened in Summer 2021 which provides a long awaited new road linking Greenbank Terrace and Milking Lane. The road not only provides access to the future development plots for residential and commercial use, but also reduces congestion on Milking Lane.

In summer, working with the Darwen Town Deal Board, the Council secured the maximum Government allocation of £25M in support of an ambitious £110M investment plan for Darwen. Key scheme proposals, including a transformed town centre core, are currently being refined and tested with the aim of this programme entering delivery by Autumn 2023.

Over the past twelve months, our growth team working alongside colleagues within business rates, have provided business support for Covid-impacted businesses in Blackburn with Darwen. Our ARG (Additional Restrictions Grant) discretionary programme has provided support to eligible businesses excluded from other forms of support. To date, the Council has deployed over £6.5m in ARG / discretionary support with over 2,000 direct payments to local businesses. This is in conjunction with over £63m provided since March 2020, via the Government's mandatory business support schemes. In total, the Council has provided over £70m in COVID business support with 14,500 individual grant payments.

**COUNCIL:
Delivered by a
strong and
resilient council**

To allow departments to return to business as usual, and allow staff deployed to support the response to Covid to return to their substantive roles, the Core Covid team was established in the summer of 2021.

8. Transparent and effective organisation

The overall purpose of the Core Covid Team is to lead the Council's continued response to the pandemic and support plans

and operational activity across services as we continue to move through recovery.

This has included:

- Leading and delivering testing, contact tracing, vaccination uptake, engagement and self-isolation support.
- Working with Public Health to help the Council deliver on its Local Outbreak Management Plan.
- Ensuring appropriate plans and strategies are in place (including 'step up' and 'surge planning'), reviewed and kept up-to-date in line with national policy.
- Providing appropriate reporting and assurance to chief officers, members and Government departments where required.
- Ensuring other departments responding to Covid have appropriate plans in place, adequate resource and support.
- Keeping up-to-date with changes in guidance and legislation and effectively communicating to residents and staff.

Our commitment to apprenticeships continues. We held an open day on October 28th where the '20 and '21 starters came together and met with Council officers and the Leader, engaged in some fun development activities with YPS staff and learnt more about the organisation.

November saw the implementation of our new HR and Payroll System, iTrent4U. The brand new cloud based HR and Payroll solution has been developed to be easy to use and improve all aspects of self-service for both managers and employees.

We have continued to provide HR & payroll services to schools and will be expanding the programme to include eight new schools from April 2022.

We were delighted to receive the Gold Award and first place in the Digital & Technology category at this year's national Public Sector Transformation Awards. Our submission highlighted the Council's new Digital Customer Platform which has been used heavily throughout the pandemic to enable residents and businesses to access support and services quickly and easily online 24/7, especially those who have had to self-isolate. Our Revenues and Benefits teams have also used digital throughout this time to provide rapid support to individuals and businesses.

This excellent work has dovetailed with improvements to the Council's website which has gone from strength-to-strength over the past year. Behind the scenes work has taken place to improve accessibility, make the site easier to navigate, improving content and look and feel.

The continued modernisation of our back office systems has also continued apace with Office 365 and MS Teams now well established among our members and workforce. Along with moving our finance and HR systems into the cloud, this work allows for the potential to enable efficiencies and transformation as we go forward.

The continued usage of digitisation has allowed us to keep staff and council members working in flexible ways. We've hosted Teams live events for member meetings and democracy has continued via technology when people weren't allowed to gather together in the workplace.

As restrictions have eased, we've also helped oversee the continued redevelopment and refurbishment of the Town Hall to a high standard, increasing usable office space in the building. The last 12 months has seen completion of phase one with staff moving onto floors 3 and 4, as well as progress on the second phase of work on floors 1 and 2 which will be completed by the end of 2021. As part of phase 2 we have installed a new audio visual system in the Council Chamber which will enable live streaming of Council meetings from 2022. This modernisation provides improved facilities for members supporting effective and modern democracy.

The digital and customer services teams have also supported during Covid by moving to take Help Hub calls and we have had to work with agility to stand up the necessary processes, staffing and systems.

We continue to roll out work from our new digital strategy, which was approved in April 2021.

6. LOOKING FORWARD

The Corporate Plan still stands and the Council will continue to deliver the strategic priorities it sets out as well as measure performance against it over the next year.

There are a number of exciting programmes and projects which will help achieve better outcomes for our residents.

The below table contains some key areas. Again, this is not a comprehensive list but intended to give a flavour of the areas we will be working on.

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

We have co-produced and launched a Participation Strategy with our children and young people, ensuring this is implemented is a top priority for the coming year. We are reviewing the impact of our Start Well Strategy and giving a real focus to challenging health and education inequalities.

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

The development at Albion Mill is now complete and the building has been handed over. Each aspect of service delivery is scheduled to begin over the coming weeks.

The Extra Care provision within Albion Mill is open to local people aged over 18 with an assessed need for care and/or support. In the run up to opening, work has been undertaken to process and review applications, coordinate care assessments and allocate suitable apartments. Individuals will begin moving into their apartments from November 2021.

The Intermediate Care facility is currently being inspected by CQC for registration approval, This service, opening early December 2021, will provide high quality, person-centred, short-term therapy led provision to residents from their own home as 'step up' and to those being discharged from hospital as 'step down'. The development of the scheme demonstrates the strong and effective partnerships across Blackburn with Darwen Council, the Clinical Commissioning Group, Inclusion Housing, Lancashire and South Cumbria Foundation Trust, Local Primary Care GP Federation and Willowbrook Homecare.

Over the next 12 months an '*Adults Social Care Quality Assurance Strategy and Framework*' will be developed and implemented in readiness for the new CQC Adult Social Care Inspection framework, due to become statutory in April 2022.

Our statutory obligations in relation to the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DOLS) will continue going forward, however the framework is under review and expected to be replaced by the Liberty Protection Safeguards by the end March 2022. We are in a good position to accommodate these changes, with good lines of communication across relevant parties.

Our partnerships across the health and care system will continue to strengthen and become more effective in integrating service provision. A number of Programme areas are well established across Pennine Lancashire, supporting the delivery and future strategic direction of hospital, community and intermediate tier services. Support to the Regulated Care Sector is also very significant at this time, particularly with respect to the recruitment and retention of care worker roles. Our Integrated Neighbourhood Teams and Primary Care Neighbourhood Groups will continue to lead and deliver high quality and locally responsive services. There is an emphasis on developing early intervention and preventative services whilst ensuring that residents receive more formal care and treatment as soon as this is required. Our wider colleagues across the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector and across the social prescribing alliance are a key part of our neighbourhood teams and alongside the Help Hub, will continue to support our communities to stay well, active and resilient.

Over the next 12 months, the team is working with Adult Social Care teams to develop a package to facilitate the recruitment of suitably qualified and skilled employees within the care sector. This will form an important part of an overarching strategy to address workforce pressures within these essential services.

Health trainers are supporting primary care with the delivery of the NHS Health Checks programme. Teams are connecting with Practices and offering the skills of our health trainers, therefore freeing up GP and Nurse resource for other Covid recovery priorities.

The Service is also actively engaged in Business Health Matters (BHM) which is a workplace health initiative led by Active Lancashire. BHM has two strands: delivery of workplace health & wellbeing checks and the identification & training of workplace health champions.

The introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has prompted an update to our needs assessment and strategy. Blackburn with Darwen has a positive track record in supporting survivors of abuse and working with those causing harm to affect their behaviour, with the majority of the requirements within the Act already in place. Additional funding from Government has been invested in further improvements to our refuge offer and support work for both perpetrators and survivors. We have also worked with Lancashire colleagues on successful bids to enhance our work with perpetrators, a priority for the partnership, securing over £1.6m over the next 2 years.

Blackburn with Darwen led a successful Lancashire-wide bid to the Changing Futures programme in July of 2021. £6.5m has been secured to improve the way in which public services respond to our most vulnerable adults with complex needs and multiple disadvantage. Blackburn with Darwen, are also leading the implementation of the programme across East Lancashire and will be the first of the four regions of Lancashire to commence operations in December 2021. By 2024 we are looking to embed the learning from the programme into mainstream delivery, achieving better outcomes with those in greatest need.

As the work progresses to affect those areas of disadvantage that can result in addiction, poor mental health and homelessness amongst other adversities for those in greatest need, Blackburn with Darwen Council will once again be running our SWEP + provision, going significantly beyond the national requirements on providing somewhere to stay during adverse weather over the winter.

Road safety remains a challenge for the authority, with concerns from residents on speeding and the standard of driving raised consistently through councillors. The Council and its partners, including the Police, are investing in more enforcement, education and engineering programmes over the coming 12 months in response. Further details on

this will be contained within the 2021-23 BwD Road Safety Strategy due for publication in December with action already ongoing in the highest risk, highest concern areas.

In October 2021 we received £282k Capability Funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) to encourage more residents to walk and cycle more through delivery of behavioural change activities (including training, travel plans, led events, grants and loan schemes) and the development of a local cycling and walking infrastructure plan (LCWIP) for the borough. We intend to use this, and future funding, to deliver change, encouraging our residents to walk and cycle more, and to do so safely, leaving a legacy of accessible and maintained infrastructure.

Our Highways service is working in collaboration with Public Health, Community Safety colleagues and external stakeholders to develop a Safer Roads Operational Group. This group brings together multi-agency partners working collaboratively with the joint aim of delivering healthier and safer roads within Blackburn with Darwen. The purpose of the Group is to manage the delivery of the new Road Safety Strategy for Blackburn with Darwen in order to reduce road casualties and achieve the vision that people are safe and feel safe on Blackburn with Darwen's roads. In particular, the Group will facilitate a collaborative approach to engagement, education, enforcement and engineering activities across Blackburn and Darwen.

Investment in the gyms at Blackburn Sports and Leisure Centre and Witton Park Arena early in 2022 will reinvigorate these fitness facilities and provide an excellent platform to launch Leisure's New Year membership campaign; encouraging increased participation and promoting the benefits of being and staying active.

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

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

In October 2021 the Council, in collaboration with Lancashire County Council (LCC), published the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) which details the bus priority and improvement measures that will, over time, make public transport the mode of choice in Blackburn with Darwen and Lancashire. This plan will deliver a multi-million pound investment in the Lancashire region's public transport system, providing bus priority measures to help speed up services, increases in services and reduction in waiting times, aiming to make buses easier and more attractive to use through development of a multi-operator ticketing system and developing Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) services.

To ensure that the public transport services being provided meet local needs we will establish a Lancashire Passengers Charter and the Bus Service Improvement Plan will be updated annually to enable us to remain flexible to changes and demands.

The Council is planning for the future with the proposed development of a new household waste recycling centre as referenced in the Local Plan consultation earlier this year. The site being investigated is in Darwen

and would be a split level site which will provide residents with an “elevated position” from which to dispose of waste, removing the need for steps. It also means containers can continue to be moved and emptied without the need to close the site. Site investigations are continuing, to ensure that the site is suitable and a report on the proposed development will be submitted to the Council’s Executive Board for consideration in early 2022.

With the burial land available at the Council’s two working cemeteries becoming limited, the Council has been investigating additional sites for future burials. Site investigations are well underway and it is anticipated that suitable new burial land will be confirmed in both Blackburn and Darwen within the next 12 months.

Public protection continues to enforce legacy Covid-19 provisions and undertake test and trace visits, and stands ready to enforce Plan B rules should they be introduced by Government. Increasingly however the focus is on catching up on work which has been delayed due to Covid, and re-establishing a business as usual service.

Digital access and inclusion remain key priorities for the Council, ensuring residents have the means to get online, stay connected and receive support with their digital journey.

The library and Adult Learning Service will continue to work together with ICT to ensure that the Council’s public access PCs and WiFi are fit for purpose.

The Council continues to work with partners to develop an exciting programme of local events and national festivals for 2022. More popular music in Witton Park combined with use of parks in Darwen and Blackburn to host events and the return of the National Festival of Making will attract many visitors and create a high profile for the borough.

**ECONOMY:
A strong and
inclusive
economy with
continued
growth**

- 6. Strong, growing economy to enable social mobility
- 7. Supporting our town centres and businesses

The Highways and Transport Service have a forward programme of highway infrastructure improvement projects to deliver in future years that are identified utilising data from inspections and are prioritised on a risk based approach. In addition, the service works with colleagues across the Place directorate to identify small to medium transport infrastructure projects that can be delivered through the annual Local Transport Plan, enabling growth and regeneration across the borough. In line with present Government guidance the Council will focus on delivery of projects that create more opportunities to walk and cycle and improve access to and the efficiency of our public transport network.

During 2021/22, another 400 new homes are anticipated, which will include the completion of 73 new family homes at Alaska St, built through Modern Methods of Construction, plus new affordable homes and bungalows in the Griffin redevelopment area. Following a protracted

CPO process at Laneside in Mill Hill, the Council is pleased to welcome the addition of 16 new family homes at Shorrocks Lane. Other new housing sites commencing in 2022 include land at Fishmoor Drive and Milking Lane in Lower Darwen, and at Ellison Fold in Darwen.

Our Growth Programme is maintaining a healthy pipeline of development sites progressing through the development cycle. For example, the recently opened Issa Way at Guide has created multiple large development plots for mixed use and the Council will be seeking proposals from developers in 2022.

A developer was recently appointed to develop Council land at Haslingden Road which includes up to 150 keyworker homes to support the Royal Blackburn Hospital in providing accommodation for key staff, such as nurses and junior doctors, alongside provision of 150 new family homes for sale. A further residential site is currently out to tender at Whalley Old Road in Blackburn and detailed planning proposals are expected to be received late 2022.

In early 2022, an ambitious Darwen investment plan will be complemented by our work to develop the Blackburn Growth Axis, a new economic investment framework which will identify key growth and infrastructure priorities and opportunities, with a focus on the town centre and connecting growth corridors. These include links to the AMRC NW and new national Cyber Taskforce HQ at Samlesbury EZ; our Furthergate, Linear Park, Imperial Mill to J6 corridor; and Haslingden Road / J5 corridor linking with new housing, the health economy and high value business growth opportunities, along with our East – West rail and road connectivity priorities.

The Council is to appoint a design team in 2022 to draw up proposals for the refurbishment of the former St John's Church following an accidental fire which caused extensive damage to the building. This flagship project will be the starting point for the wider redevelopment of the eastern Blackburn town centre area, with further exciting proposals to be shared alongside the new Local Plan, to be published for consultation in January 2022.

In early 2022, we will have developed a new skills plan and Cultural Investment Framework to support our growth plans, strategic case-making work and the development of the Council's new Corporate Strategy.

These key pieces of work will look to position Blackburn with Darwen to take advantage of new national growth funds, as Government clarifies Levelling Up, Shared Prosperity and other new investment opportunities, while we continue to work hard with private investors and others to secure new employment and wealth creation opportunities for the borough.

	Work continues to defray remaining funds to help best support the economic recovery within Blackburn with Darwen. All ongoing ARG work will come to a close on March 31st 2022, as per Government guidance.
<p>COUNCIL: Delivered by a strong and resilient council</p> <p>8. Transparent and effective organisation</p>	<p>We will be continuing to roll-out our digital strategy. Within the next 12 months we will be upgrading our telephony infrastructure and more digital systems will move to the cloud, continuing our structured approach to modernising back office systems, delivering efficiencies and increasing digitisation and service improvements for customers.</p> <p>Over the next 12 months the third and final phase of our Town Hall refurbishment programme will deliver modernised and improved spaces for staff to work flexibly and effectively.</p> <p>We will continue to deliver improvement and transformation across the Council, further developing new ways of working, process improvement and best value for money services.</p> <p>Through our customer research and service design methods we will deliver further improvements to our website enabling increasing public involvement and transparency. The introduction of regular web casting of council meetings will strengthen our approach to more open, local democracy and increase opportunities for involvement across the borough.</p>

6.1 The Covid-19 memorial

Similar to a number of other Councils across the country, we are planning to create a permanent Covid memorial in the borough.

Early thinking is to use and build on existing plans linked to the environment, wellbeing and creative arts activity to establish a 'trail' of different elements which people can follow on a map. This could include many things from benches, garden areas and woodland planting to commissioned works of art and way markers or plaques in local beauty spots.

The outdoor theme and the various elements will create positivity and a lasting legacy recognising the tremendous efforts of the NHS and all frontline workers, the community spirit and resilience shown by the people of the borough, whilst honouring and remembering lost loved ones.

Planning is taking place and residents will be asked for their view on locations and the type of things to include via the Shuttle Extra magazine in the New Year.

6.2 Blackburn's bid for city status: #BackingBlackburn

On behalf of the town, the Council has announced it is intending to bid for City Status for Blackburn. This is part of a national competition to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022. The Council is engaging with a wide range public sector organisations, education

providers, businesses and other high profile civic leaders and personalities on a local, regional and national level, asking them to back the bid.

To support the application, local authorities are asked to submit 50 pictures to 'sell the place'. A photography competition has been launched to help with this which has already had an overwhelming response.

A campaign with the strapline #BackingBlackburn has been launched and has already received wide-reaching support.

The benefits of city status include international exposure, attracting new and growing business - benefiting both business and employee confidence - highlighting the area as a tourist destination as well as upping our role on the national stage and giving us a stronger voice both regionally and nationally. Research has also shown that the economic advantages are demonstrable with those newest appointed cities outperforming their regional counterparts in terms of increasing investment and reducing unemployment.

Although this is a Blackburn bid, being granted city status will have benefits for the whole borough. It will complement the investment provided by the Dawen Town Deal and increase opportunities for more investment, tourism, media, economic impact, skills, jobs as well as highlight the array of cultural assets and projects the borough delivers.

We are currently in the final stage of preparing the application with a deadline of December 8. An announcement is expected in 2022.

6.3 Corporate plan refresh and engagement

From January, the Council will look to embark on a programme of engagement with our residents, businesses and partners.

As the response to Covid has shown, the Council cannot achieve its ambitions for the borough without working closely with others.

Partnership working is a key foundation of the current corporate plan and continues to be viewed as a major strength of this Council and this borough.

We want to continue this approach and ensure the Council's priorities are shaped by our residents, businesses and partners. It will be our explicit commitment that there will be a number of ways for our communities to have their voices heard.

We will be gathering insight from already planned consultations such as the Local Plan, use existing engagement networks such as the Covid champions, hold specific stakeholder events, commission a residents' survey, the first one since 2018, and develop a programme of executive member-led engagement sessions.

Individual pieces of engagement to develop other complementary plans and strategies will also be used.

The programme will underpin the new corporate plan with a view to having the new plan agreed by Council in summer next year.

6.4 Climate change action plan and other key strategies to be developed

In July 2019, Council Forum declared a 'Climate Emergency' and in February this year Executive Board approved our first draft Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP). An update on this plan will be presented to December's Executive Board.

Delivering on our climate responsibilities and providing leadership to tackle the climate emergency will be a key focus of this Council. Every area of the Council will be involved. The Council needs to show real leadership on this agenda and we will need every resident, business and all partners to work with us if we are to meet our climate change obligations. Robust engagement with our residents and businesses is a major priority. Our action plan will be one of the central planks of a refreshed corporate plan.

We will also renew our Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The current strategy aligned work across the life course, for which a Start Well, Live Well and Age Well board were set up, with a range of partners including health, social care and the voluntary sector. The updated strategy will revisit the current strategy, highlight the progress made in each area, as well as highlighting the impact that Covid-19 has had on our local population. It will be another key document that underpins the new corporate plan.

To ensure our services are the best they can be, and we continue to be a transparent and effective organisation, we have also started a substantial programme of organisational development. The programme will relook at our values and culture, our story and corporate narrative, our training and skills offer for staff, the way we recruit talent and how we involve staff in shaping the future of the organisation in a post-pandemic world. Improving the health and wellbeing of our staff will also be a central theme. The organisational development (OD) programme will also create a framework to enable staff to shape the new corporate plan.

A communications and engagement strategy will also be developed over the next year. The Council has always been recognised for its commitment to open, honest and effective communications. This has been especially true throughout the pandemic when clear messages and meaningful engagement with our communities has been of the utmost importance.

While we have continuously shown good practice as a Council and have developed several excellent targeted strategies, such as our Participation Strategy with our children and young people, we have yet to produce and publish a single overarching document which outlines our principles, aims, objectives, how we communicate and engage and how we evaluate. The strategy will be developed alongside engagement work.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Funding for both Blackburn's city bid and the robust engagement programme will be managed from existing resources.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications.

10. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

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

12. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

An equality impact assessment is not required.

13. CONSULTATIONS

There are no consultations.

Chief Officer

Contact Officer: Denise Park, Chief Executive

Date: 25/11/21

Background Papers: Corporate Plan 2019-2023; Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018-2022; NHS Health and Social Care Integration Update on Partnerships and Governance – October Executive Board.

Background documents are any files, guidance or other materials that have been relied upon in producing the paper. Any background documents listed must be available for public inspection upon request.