

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR MOHAMMED KHAN

Date: 27th January 2022

Covid-19

At the last update we were preparing for the challenges of the winter months and the potential of a new variant, little did we know how crucial that preparation would be. The arrival of Omicron has resulted in case rates higher than we've seen since the start of the pandemic, which has had huge impacts on business continuity due to the numbers of people needing to isolate. What has been more positive is that, whilst we have seen a rise in the numbers of hospitalisations, the evidence has shown that fewer people are needing critical care and their stay in hospital is generally shorter.

The Government also introduced Plan B amongst many other changes to guidance and advice, which Council teams have been working hard to ensure is communicated effectively to residents.

Whilst case rates remain high, vaccine, testing, tracing and isolating are still key in our defence against Covid-19 to support the NHS and social care settings by minimising infection and transmission in our communities. Residents are encouraged to get vaccinated including getting their booster when eligible. The Council is working closely with NHS colleagues to ensure more local vaccine appointments are made available in the coming weeks so that everyone can easily get vaccinated.

To help with this, I'm also very proud that Blackburn with Darwen has been able to host the county's first drive-through vaccination site at Ewood Park. The clinic has offered booster jabs, as well as first and second doses to everyone aged 12 and over. It is part of the national drive to get as many people boosted as possible due to the Omicron variant and is one of only a few drive-throughs in the country. My thanks goes to Blackburn Rovers FC for their continued support for our pandemic response.

Our Community, Our Future social integration programme

Good progress is being made towards year three delivery of the Our Community, Our Future social integration programme. At the last board meeting in November 2021, we heard this first-hand from guest speakers across our Workforce Integration and Youth Ambassador projects along with our ESOL project.

The ESOL Hub continues to work in partnership with our ESOL providers supporting them through a very challenging set of circumstances for education establishments throughout Covid. Through the Learning English Together website another 60 referrals were made from October until the end of December 2021. This programme is delivered by five of the Hub education providers and three of the borough's well established local third sector organisations; Arts 2 Heal, the Bureau and Lancashire Wildlife Trust. The third sector providers work alongside the classroom delivery to give learners real social mixing opportunities with a chance to practise their language skills, meet new people and connect to the borough.

The Youth Ambassador programme is delivered through a partnership between Blackburn Youth Zone, Blackburn Rovers Community Trust, BwD Young People's Services, Healthy Living, IMO, One Voice Blackburn and Youth Action. 16 of the 18 planned cohorts have started and the programme has provided opportunities for 12 to 16 year olds to get involved in their community through team building, and working with other people their age from different parts of the borough.

Spring North and Blackburn Rovers Community Trust continued their collaboration in delivering the Community Ambassador programme which has brought together local people keen to develop community leadership skills to make a difference where they live.

Participants on the Workforce Integration Ambassador project delivered by Blackburn College have completed the four day training. Participants continue to work on social action plans for the remainder of the programme.

Twenty-two local groups have been delivering a diverse range of projects through the OCOF Grants programme with activities available for people of all ages. An example of integration in action is the Nurtured by Nature project: structured activities have been delivered ranging from planting and crafting, eco therapy, tai chi, archery, cycling taster sessions and nature walks. Activities took place across two sites: Corporation Park and Witton Park. Beneficiaries were diverse in both background and skills, and shared experiences and skills between each other during activities.

Together an Active Future (TaAF) - Sport England update

As Together an Active Future has become more influential - supporting partners, organisations and community groups to encourage people to move more - it has emphasised the importance of finding a 'shared purpose' where physical activity is a central theme. Where this has been achieved it has contributed massively to the development of more collaborative working, linking organisations up together to make best use of resources and engaging with local people in their own communities.

The Witton Park Green House Project is thriving and now provides eight weekly activity sessions for BwD residents from a diversity of backgrounds, abilities and cultures, supported by local volunteers. This strong collaboration of local organisations is bringing these fabulous greenhouses back to life and making them accessible to all.

Exciting conversations have started to look at how our local cultural organisations can encourage active travel; how the successful cross-fit training programme can improve the physical and mental health of men within the criminal justice system and how the successful social prescribing model in BwD uses physical activity linkages to further strengthen its offer, improving connections to local activity and exercise services and providers.

Being part of a Sport England Local Delivery Pilot is giving Blackburn with Darwen lots of opportunities to come together and try new ways of doing things to encourage participation. The important messages and value of being active for our residents, both for prevention and recovery has been highlighted over the last two years and I'm keen that BwD continues to learn from our work with Sport England throughout 2022 and beyond.

Health and Wellbeing Board

On November 8th the Health and Wellbeing Board held a development session with colleagues from the Lancashire and South Cumbria Health Equity Commission, led by Sir Michael Marmot and the Institute of Health Equity, to help identify priorities, barriers and opportunities/ideas to address long-standing health inequalities across the region. The outcomes of the session will be incorporated into the Commission's overall conclusions and fed back to the Health and Wellbeing Board for further consideration in Spring 2022.

Household Support Scheme

In October the government announced a new Household Support Fund grant to support those most in need this winter. Blackburn with Darwen was allocated £1,618,526 and this has been used to assist residents over the winter with access to food, fuel, boiler servicing and repairs, white goods and other essentials. At least 50% of the fund is being allocated to families with children who meet the scheme criteria with the rest available for other vulnerable adults who also meet criteria. As with previous grants, the Council is working with a range of partners to deliver this programme and promote the scheme to residents.

Community Volunteer Awards

Blackburn with Darwen's community champions were honoured at the 2021 Community Volunteer Awards held in King George's Hall in November. The Community Volunteer Awards celebrate the wonderful and dedicated people and groups who make a difference in Blackburn and Darwen year in, year out, and help to make it a better place.

20 awards were presented to people and groups who go the extra mile to support others, help make their neighbourhoods better places to live.

A record 416 nominations were received, showing the gratitude that people feel for all the work put in by the borough's volunteers and helpers over the past year.

In the last year our borough's community heroes rose to the challenge more than ever in response to the pandemic and were a lifeline for so many people who needed extra help.

The awards are organised by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and Community CVS, with support from local businesses and community organisations.

Corporate Plan

Members agreed to refresh the corporate plan at December's Policy Council. To provide the evidence base, a programme of engagement will take place over the next six months including a residents' survey later in the year. Key items include climate change, organisational development, health and wellbeing and jobs and skills. It is the intention to adopt the new corporate plan in July.

Holocaust Memorial Day

In Blackburn with Darwen, we firmly stand by the belief that no community should live in fear for its people's safety as they go about practicing their religious beliefs or identity. As a Council we condemn in the strongest terms any acts of hate, violence or terror including the incident in Texas earlier this month.

Holocaust Memorial Day is held on January 27th each year to remember the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust, alongside the millions of other people killed under Nazi persecution of other groups and in genocides that followed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

Every year, as a community, Blackburn with Darwen comes together to promote and support Holocaust Memorial Day. The theme for Holocaust Memorial Day 2022 is 'One Day' and I, along with other community leaders, partners and friends have used the day to stand in solidarity and engage in events and activities that inspire hope for a future free from hate crime and prejudice.

Elections

The Elections team successfully completed the annual canvass registration and published the new Electoral Register on 1 December 2021. The canvass achieved an 80% national and local data match, leaving only 20% of properties to be canvassed. The team are now starting to plan for the local elections and two parish council elections on 5 May 2022