

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR MOHAMMED KHAN

Date 24th March 2022

Cost of Living

We are living through tough financial times at the moment and know many of our residents are worried about the ongoing increase in the cost of living with energy bills, fuel and people's weekly food bills all going up. We don't want people to struggle though – there is a range of local and national help and areas of support available on issues around money and debt, homes and housing, fuel costs, food, gambling and work and employment and our financial resilience campaign which has been running since February is signposting residents.

Help includes the Household Support Scheme for families and children and other vulnerable adults - who may or may not meet the threshold for benefits but may be affected by the cost of living crisis - to get support with utility bills, food and other essentials throughout the winter period to help keep them warm and fed. The scheme, from the Council and partners, will run until 31st March.

There is also our Help Hub, started in March 2020 with our partners in urgent response to the first pandemic lockdown, which can still help with food banks, credit unions, and lots more.

Queen's Platinum Jubilee

The borough is gearing up for a long weekend of celebrations to mark Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June. A range of activities are planned as the Queen becomes the first monarch ever to reign for 70 years.

Talented Blackburn artist Jamie Holman has been commissioned to create a new masterpiece marking the Jubilee and we look forward to seeing his work in Blackburn. We're also supporting Darwen Scouts to arrange a lighting of a beacon at Darwen's Jubilee Tower. We will be running a competition to decide who lights the beacon.

Blackburn and Darwen town centres will both be dressed for the occasion with bunting and new jubilee themed planting displays. A 'Last Night of the Proms' celebration and Darwen Live will be taking place amongst a long list of community organised events in the borough over the weekend.

We're also encouraging residents to come together with friends, family and neighbours to arrange a 'Big Jubilee Lunch' and street parties. We are sharing planning guides for residents, including details on road closures and more. Tree planting will be encouraged through the official Queen's Green Canopy Scheme.

Blackburn is also, of course, bidding for City Status as part of the Jubilee honours and we are eagerly awaiting the decision on whether we have been successful this Spring.

Ukraine

We have been shocked and horrified by the unprovoked and escalating invasion of Ukraine by Russia. The aggression is being rightly condemned across the world. I know I am not alone in sending my thoughts and prayers to those who are facing this terrible crisis.

Blackburn with Darwen stands in solidarity with Ukrainians across Blackburn with Darwen and the UK. We urge world-leaders to work together to restore peace. We also know that our residents with roots in Russia, and the wider region, will have deep concerns about what is happening too, so it's important not to tar them with the actions of the state.

Immediate action is needed from the Government to work with local councils, like ourselves, to prepare the necessary support and resources needed for refugees who come to the UK. Blackburn with Darwen has a proud history of supporting those in need, and we will do what we can to maintain that throughout this time. Donations can be made towards the internationally recognised British Red Cross appeal with donation points available across communities.

Covid-19

At the last update we were in the middle of the Omicron wave, which we know resulted in huge case rates and lots of disruption for many. The situation has changed quite dramatically since then and the Government has now announced its Living with Covid Plan, where regulations are replaced with Public Health advice and an emphasis on personal responsibility in the same way we manage other infectious illnesses. We know that free testing will end for most residents on the 31st March, however will remain for certain settings, such as care homes and hospitals and for some of our more vulnerable residents. We are yet to get the full details of this and as always will share information as soon as we have it.

Whilst the regulations have been lifted, we do however need to maintain our resilience and be able to step up and respond to future variants or surges in cases and we are working on our own local living with Covid plan to ensure we can respond appropriately if needed. It is important to remember that Covid has not gone away and we should still come forward for vaccinations and ask that everyone continues to follow the guidance to keep everyone safe.

Much of our focus will now move on to recovery and how we can support everyone to live and work safely with Covid.

Our Community, Our Future social integration programme

The Community Ambassador project continues to be delivered. The Borough will benefit from more Community Ambassadors ready to support social action, driven by residents who have the desire and willingness to do more in their own community.

From January 2022, a number of partners from the Strategic Youth Alliance continued to deliver the Youth Ambassador project. Youth Ambassadors have increased their awareness of opportunities to get involved in local social action and to become friends with more people from across the borough so they feel much more connected than ever before. This project harnesses the strength of having one of the largest youth populations in the country and provides real focus towards self-belief, thinking bigger and becoming a valuable part of the borough's future.

Our Workforce Integration Ambassador project delivered by Blackburn College has now concluded. The Ambassadors all come from local employers who are aiming to breakdown cultural and practical barriers for a much more diverse workforce. Going forward employers will aim to recruit from a wider talent pool because of this training, which will support economic growth and retain residents to take up employment opportunities rather than look elsewhere.

Health and Wellbeing Board

The Health and Wellbeing Board met on the 26th January 2022 for a Development Session on Mental Wellbeing. The session was designed to clearly define mental wellbeing and to raise its importance with the Board. Colleagues from Public Health presented numerous pieces of work that they have been developing including the Prevention Concordat, a 12 month action plan for mental health and the Mental Wellbeing Inequalities Framework. The outcomes of the session will be the signing up to the Prevention Concordat by the Board at their next meeting.

Health and Care Integration

To support the continued enhancement of the four Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs) an internal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis has taken place to inform the development of an annual development plan. Once produced, the plan which will be overseen by the Integrated Neighbourhood Clinical Co-ordinators who will set out a series of key priorities and milestones to be implemented across the West, North, East and Darwen INTs. Over the next few weeks the INT Clinical Co-ordinators will provide INT members with the opportunity to engage and be involved in the development.

As we have continued to experience high numbers of referrals into the INTs over the past few months there is much learning and key insights to reflect upon. Key strengths that have been identified include the wider membership of the INTs, the positive working relationships between members of each INT and the joint planning and co-ordination that takes place on a daily basis which helps hundreds of local people and their family members throughout BwD receive the best possible health, social care and community support available.

The Social Prescribing Alliance continues to be an important asset for the BwD neighbourhood workforce and is expanding on a monthly basis. The Alliance provides a support network for the borough's Social Prescribing Link Workers who are currently developing a range of new marketing materials throughout the local community to further promote the support available for local people. The Social

Prescribing Chronic Pain partnership group which has been established to provide an advanced, innovative wrap around offer for local people who live with chronic pain is progressing well. Work is underway to ensure evidence-based wellbeing interventions are included as part of the offer to help local people live alongside their pain whilst living a meaningful life.

The Government also published its [integration white paper](#) last month. Under the plans, local authorities and the NHS will be encouraged to share data and be more transparent about their performance. A new integrated system will also allow the NHS to notify a local authority immediately if someone needs social care support. The white paper builds on both the Health and Social Care Bill and the People at the Heart of Care white paper, announced in December, which set out a 10-year plan for social care funded through the Health and Care Levy.

Devolution

The 15 councils across Lancashire are continuing to work in close collaboration on a proposal for a devolution (county) deal with Government. All 15 of the councils, which includes Blackburn with Darwen Council, Lancashire County Council, Blackpool Council and the 12 districts are engaged in political discussions around a shared vision and ambition, making steps to progress a strategic long term plan for Lancashire and discussing arrangements around a devolution deal.

National Festival of Making 2022

The award-winning National Festival of Making returns for its fourth edition on the 11th and 12th of June 2022. Planning and preparations are progressing with our partners. In the run up to the event, the Festival's organisers have launched the "The Big Reinvention Challenge" in collaboration with creative educators, Little Inventors. The Challenge invites children aged 7-12 to use what we already have as a starting point to create something new. Three of the most unique and inspiring ideas submitted by children will be brought to life as prototypes or models by professional makers.

Significant crowds are expected in Blackburn over the Festival weekend. This will create a wonderful atmosphere and we hope it will also be a means of strengthening the economy of our local businesses who have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, it will be a great opportunity for the community to come together and enjoy an exciting array of events, continuing that feeling of euphoria and cohesion in the town from the Platinum Jubilee celebrations the previous week.

I would recommend that you all share the details of this wonderful festival to family and friends. I will provide more details at future meetings. We are working with many partners to ensure the Festival continues to be a huge success. I invite all members to attend the Festival and promote our borough as a great place to live, work and visit.