AGENDA ITEM 9

BATHING WATER QUALITY SCRUTINY REVIEW UPDATE REPORT

1.0 Matter for consideration

1.1 The Committee to consider an update report following the most recent meeting of the Bathing Water Scrutiny Review Panel.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That the Scrutiny Committee considers and notes the update report.

2.2 To agree that the Panel holds a further meeting in February 2015 to continue to monitor bathing water.

3.0 Background Information

3.1 At its meeting on 27th September 2012, the Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review into bathing water quality, in light of the revised Bathing Water Directive, which was due to come into effect from 2015 and appointed a Scrutiny Panel comprised of Councillors Mrs Callow JP (Lead Member), D. Coleman, Henderson MBE, Hutton, Lee and O’Hara.

3.2 The Panel established the following overall objective for the review:

‘To ensure that plans and proposals to improve the quality of bathing water at Blackpool’s beaches are drafted and implemented by the Council and its partner organisations, in order to ensure Blackpool’s bathing waters meet the standards required of them.’

3.3 Over the course of the review the Panel was advised of the partnership approach taken by the various key organisations in order to tackle the issue of raising bathing water quality standards and noted the proposed number of different actions of partners, in order to meet the challenge of improving bathing water quality.

3.4 The Panel concluded that the various organisations had quite clearly demonstrated that a great deal of work was being undertaken in response to the more stringent standards that were due to be introduced and recommended that the proposed action of the key partner organisations be endorsed and scrutiny continue to monitor their progress.

3.5 The final report of the Panel was approved at Scrutiny Committee on 13th June 2013 and the Panel’s recommendation was agreed at the 15th July 2013 meeting of the Executive.

3.6 The Panel agreed to meet again, following the publication of the 2013 bathing season water quality results, in order to review the progress being made in improving standards.
4.0 Bathing Water Scrutiny Review Panel meeting – 26th February 2014

4.1 The Panel met on 26th February 2014 and received a presentation from Mr Dan Bond, Bathing Water Project Manager, Environment Agency on the 2013 bathing season water quality results and information regarding short term pollution and future predictions. The Panel also received information from Mrs Clare Nolan Barnes, Head of Capital Projects and Regeneration, Blackpool Council and Chairman of the Fylde Peninsula Water Management Group on the continuing work in respect of Campaigns, Coast Council, Beach Cleans and Business Engagement.

4.2 The Panel was advised of the results of the below designated bathing waters on the Fylde Coast:

- Fleetwood  Fail  
- Cleveleys  Pass  
- Bispham  Pass  
- Blackpool North  Pass  
- Blackpool Central  Pass  
- Blackpool South  Pass  
- St Annes North  Pass  
- St Annes South  Fail  

4.3 It was explained that the results were based upon the current testing regime and that the main reason for the bathing waters at Fleetwood and St Annes South having failed the testing was due to their proximity to estuaries. Members were also advised that bathing water quality was heavily dependent upon the weather, as generally, the wetter the weather, the worse the water quality results would be due to the adverse impact upon the sewage system capacity.

4.4 The Panel was advised that local authorities were able to predict short term pollution events, lasting up to 72 hours, which were caused by severe wet weather. At these times, local authorities were able to display temporary signs advising against bathing. The Panel was also advised that should testing samples be taken during the advertised short term pollution period, they could be discounted from the overall results for the bathing water quality, with a maximum of up to 15 per cent of the bathing water sample results being able to be discounted. The Panel was informed that short term pollution notices had been trailed last year at Fylde Coast bathing waters and would be employed throughout the 2014 bathing water season.

4.5 The Panel was provided with details of the key actions for improvement, which included approximately £250 million worth of investment from United Utilities, targeted campaigns to farm and caravan sites and the work of ‘LovemyBeach’.

4.6 The Panel was also provided with details of the work being undertaken with regards to educating and involving young people in the issues surrounding bathing water quality, which had resulted in the issue of bathing water being placed on geography curriculums and the establishment of a ‘Coast Council’.

4.7 Members raised a number of concerns regarding the challenge of improving the standard of Blackpool’s bathing water quality and noted there was added difficulty due to the physical geography of the location being adjacent to a densely populated urban area, near estuaries and having a relatively high average rainfall.

4.8 The Panel noted that the work of the Turning Tides Strategy Group, which provided strategic direction on improving bathing water quality for the North West region as a whole, had received national recognition for its good work from the Department for
4.9 The Panel concluded that it was clear that a great deal of progress was being made in response to the more stringent standards of the revised directive. It was agreed that the Panel should meet again in a year’s time, in order to continue monitoring progress and for consideration of the 2014 bathing season water quality results.

5.0 Witnesses / representatives

5.1 As requested by the Committee members, the following persons have been invited to attend the meeting to speak on the matter:

- Councillor Mrs Callow JP, Scrutiny Lead / Shadow Cabinet Member for Tourism and Culture and Highways, Transport and Equality and Diversity.
- Clare Nolan Barnes, Head of Capital Projects and Regeneration

Relevant officer:
Chris Kelly, Senior Democratic Services Adviser (Scrutiny)
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Appendices attached:
None

Background papers:
None.