

MINUTES OF AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING - THURSDAY, 7 APRIL 2016

Present:

Councillor Galley (in the Chair)

Councillors

Benson	Hunter	Maycock	Owen
Hobson	Matthews	O'Hara	

In Attendance:

Mr Neil Jack, Chief Executive

Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Place

Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

Ms Tracy Greenhalgh, Chief Internal Auditor

Mr Chris Kelly, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser (Scrutiny)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 10 MARCH 2016

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting held on 10 March 2016 be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

3 STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER - REPUTATIONAL DAMAGE

The Committee considered a progress report in relation to the individual risks identified on the Strategic Risk Register, specifically in relation to risks regarding Reputational Damage. The Committee discussed plans to control and mitigate the risks with the strategic risk owners, Mr Jack, Chief Executive and Mr Cavill, Director of Place.

Mr Jack advised that in order to assess the measurement of the reputation of the Council and of Blackpool, the media, which included social media, was monitored daily. He explained to Members the process that was followed in regards to granting interviews with media organisations and producing press releases, which helped to build the reputation of the Council and the town.

The Committee was informed that the Government's view of the Council and Blackpool was significantly shaped by inspections and GCSE results. Mr Jack explained that receiving 'inadequate' ratings in more than one inspection could have a detrimental impact on the reputation of the Council as a whole, not just on the inspected services. He reported to the Committee that recent improvements in Children's Services had resulted in improved inspection findings and that had subsequently helped to improve the reputation of the

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Council.

Members were provided with details of the work that was being undertaken to promote a positive image of Blackpool in order to encourage investment. It was noted that a lot of people in influential positions had links to the town and positive memories of the place, which had helped to build relationships and connections. Members questioned whether more could be done to work with the private sector, especially with regards to businesses that were not part of the tourism industry. Mr Cavill advised that there had been more than 30 enquiries from businesses regarding the enterprise zone, which should help to increase the promotion of Blackpool.

Mr Cavill advised the Committee of the multi-agency Communications Operative Group, whose purpose was to manage media requests. Members were provided with details of the various requests to film in Blackpool that were considered by the Group and it was noted that Blackpool was one of the most filmed locations in the North West. Mr Cavill reported to the Committee that the Group worked to ensure that the people filming in Blackpool enjoyed a positive experience, in an attempt to increase the likelihood of their return. Mr Cavill also advised the Committee of the success of the joint 'Blackpool's Back' campaign to promote the town and noted the high quality marketing material that was produced.

Members noted that a sub-risk of the Strategic Risk was 'Residents' negative image of Blackpool' and the Committee discussed the requirement to provide high quality services in order to help generate more local pride in Blackpool. It was also considered that the development of Channel Shift would help to further improve residents' opinion of the quality of services delivered. , Members also raised questions relating to the establishment of Citizen's Panels. Mr Jack noted that the aim of the Citizen's Panels was to change the way the Council engaged with the public, but that the establishment of the Panels was currently a work in progress.

The Committee raised questions relating to the potential for attracting more conference trade to the town and Mr Cavill advised of the work that was being undertaken to increase the number of good quality hotel rooms, which would make Blackpool more attractive for potential conference organisers.

A question was raised regarding the damage to the reputation of the town as a result of the off-field issues of Blackpool Football Club. Mr Jack advised that the success of a local football club was often overstated in its impact upon the local economy and noted that, as a result of changes to kick off times to accommodate television schedules, businesses in the Bloomfield Ward area close to the stadium had benefitted to a greater extent when the football club was in the Championship rather than in the Premier League.

Members raised questions relating to the Sub Risk of 'Visitors' negative image of Blackpool', with specific regards to the Cookson Street approach to the Talbot Gateway. Members were advised of the complexities that were involved in improving the area, but that there was a long term ambition to make improvements.

Background papers: None.

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4 UNITED UTILITIES CRYPTOSPORIDIUM INCIDENT - DEBRIEF RECOMMENDATIONS

Ms Greenhalgh advised that the report had been requested by the Committee at its meeting of 26 November 2015, in order to provide information on the findings and recommendations of the structured internal debrief that took place relating to the incident of traces of Cryptosporidium being found in the water supply to areas of Lancashire including Blackpool.

The Committee was advised by Ms Greenhalgh that the Water Debrief report contained twenty-eight recommendations, the majority of which had been referred to the Lancashire Resilience Forum for a multi-agency response. However, there were a number of recommendations specific to Blackpool Council that needed to be addressed.

Ms Greenhalgh explained that one of the issues that was specific to the Council, was that internal communications needed to be improved, with particular regards to ensuring that all relevant Council staff could access the Resilience Direct website, in the event of a similar, future incident. It was noted that only one officer had been able to access Resilience Direct throughout the duration of the incident, which had lasted for 31 days.

Responding to questions from Members, Ms Greenhalgh advised that the requirement to review business continuity arrangements for prolonged incidents would be considered in the new business continuity plan template, which was currently being developed. Ms Greenhalgh advised that a further priority action arising from the structured internal debrief, was that the Corporate Leadership Team would identify staff that could be called upon to act as a loggist in a major incident and that it would be required to approve the provision of training for staff to perform their duties appropriately.

Members questioned when the results following a review of the Cryptosporidium incident would be conveyed to the public and Ms Greenhalgh advised that United Utilities were currently awaiting the findings of the Drinking Water Inspectorate.

The Committee discussed the response from United Utilities and the involvement of the Council in communications to the public throughout the duration of the incident. Members were advised that lessons had been learned with regards to how to manage such an incident and it was considered that there was a clear benefit to providing transparent explanations of incidents to the public.

Background papers: None.

5 CIPFA FRAUD AND CORRUPTION TRACKER (2015)

Ms Greenhalgh provided the Committee with the outcomes of the national survey undertaken by the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) in relation to fraud and corruption. She explained that the findings of the report would be utilised to inform the risk register and a basis for the proactive approach taken to corporate

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fraud work.

Members raised questions relating to housing benefit fraud. Ms Greenhalgh noted that the levels in Blackpool were quite high compared to the national average, but that the issue was now the responsibility of the Department for Work and Pensions. However, the Department for Work and Pensions' response to dealing with the type of fraud did result in resource implications for the Council, due to the number of enquiries that had to be made to the Council as part of their investigations. Members requested that benchmarking information on housing benefit fraud be presented in a report to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Committee agreed to request benchmarking information on housing benefit fraud be presented in a report to a future meeting of the Committee

Background papers: None.

6 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted the time and date of the next meeting as 6pm on Thursday 26 May 2016 at Town Hall, Blackpool, subject to approval at Annual Council.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.10 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:

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