

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
WEDNESDAY, 21 JUNE 2017**

Present:

Councillor Hunter (in the Chair)

Councillors

Mrs Callow JP
Matthews

Mitchell
Roberts

Ryan
D Scott

Singleton

In Attendance:

Councillor Gillian Campbell, Deputy Leader of the Council (Tourism, Economic Growth and Jobs)

Councillor Fred Jackson, Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services.

Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Economic Development

Councillor Mrs Christine Wright, Cabinet Member for Housing

Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

Mr Anthony Lockley, Head of Strategic Development

Mr Paolo Pertica, Head of Visitors Services

Mr Ian Barnes, Accountant, Treasury Management

Mrs Clare Nolan-Barnes, Head of Coastal and Environmental Partnership Investments

Mr Steve Sienkiewicz, Clerk to the Committee.

Apologies had been received from Councillor G. Coleman who was engaged elsewhere on Council business.

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETINGS HELD ON 2 FEBRUARY 2017 AND 10 FEBRUARY 2017

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meetings held on 2 February 2017 and 10 February 2017 be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record, subject to the following statement being added to the minutes for agenda item 2 on 10 February 2017:

‘The Committee would like to place on record its thanks and appreciation to all our staff who are our greatest asset and who have risen to the challenge in what have been and continue to be very difficult times’.

3 PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Committee noted that there were no applications from members of the public to speak at the meeting.

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4 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Executive and Cabinet Member decisions within the remit of the Committee taken since the last meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Jackson, Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services responded to a question from the Committee in connection with decision number PH12/2017 'The proposed fees and charges for the Integrated Transport section, relating to the Rideability service for 2017/2018'. He confirmed that the increased charges had been agreed in advance with the service and that it remained as popular as it had been previously.

The Committee raised questions in relation to decision number EX11/2017 'To consider the authorisation of £1,995,000 expenditure and the associated funding package in order to carry out priority works to the Coronation Street façade and Spanish Hall roof of the Winter Gardens complex'. Members expressed concern that the scaffolding on Coronation Street had been there for several months and asked what progress was being made. Mr A. Lockley, Head of Strategic Development explained that the reason was due to the continued work on the façade that would re-commence after the summer and it not making any sense to dismantle and re-erect the scaffolding during that time. The Committee asked about the possibility of nearby businesses being compensated for the downturn in business and inconvenience during the time of the works. Councillor Campbell, Deputy Leader of the Council responded by explaining that a reduction in business rates for those affected would be looked into.

The Committee agreed to note the Executive and Cabinet Member decisions.

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the items contained within the Forward Plan, June 2017 – September 2017, relating to the portfolios of the Cabinet Members whose responsibilities fell within the remit of the Committee.

In relation to decision reference 11/2017 'Purchase of property for Starter Home development in Mereside/South Blackpool Council', it was agreed and noted that the relevant Cabinet Member was Councillor Wright and not Councillor Smith as stated within the report. Asked by the Committee to provide more details about the proposal, Councillor Wright explained that a decision would not be taken this year and therefore the item could be removed from the Forward Plan. She further explained that the required consultation process would add to the timescales and that it was the Homes and Communities Agency that was interested in potential sites for starter homes.

In connection with decision reference 4/2017 'Housing Plan for an Ageing Population', Councillor Wright confirmed that the examination of sheltered housing requirements would be included in this proposal.

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In relation to decision reference 19/2017 'Consideration of a new Housing Strategy for Blackpool', the Committee pointed out that the proposed consultation was to be conducted via the Council's website and raised concerns that it was unlikely to be fully inclusive and reach out far enough as a result. Councillor Campbell stated she did not wish to exclude anyone from participating in the consultation and would therefore look into this further.

The Committee agreed to note the Forward Plan items.

6 PROVISIONAL REVENUE OUTTURN 2016/2017

The Committee considered the Provisional Revenue Outturn for 2016/2017 compared with the approved budget and the capital expenditure in the year ended 31 March 2017 with sources of funding.

The report was presented by Mr S. Thompson, Director of Resources. He provided a summary of the current situation before responding to questions from the Committee.

In relation to Ward Budgets, the Committee noted the scheme commitments of £287,000 being carried forward into 2017/2018, although the report also indicated a £39,000 overspend relating to expected income not being realised. Members asked for more information on this and Mr Thompson explained that the £287,000 would carry over in full, although he agreed to find out more detail regarding the £39,000 and report back in due course.

The Committee pointed out the overspending and income shortfalls of £109,000 in Illuminations, within the Places Directorate and asked what was being done to ensure income shortfalls were minimised in the future. Mr Thompson explained that the Director of Place would try to compensate for the indicated shortfall going forward and that actions would be put in place from lessons learnt over the previous year.

Pointing out that the income target for Parking Services had not been achieved, the Committee asked for details as to what was being done to improve the situation during the current year. Mr P. Pertica, Head of Visitors Services explained that a review had been carried out and all possible actions were being taken to improve payment methods for public parking. Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Economic Development added that there had been a number of issues with payment machines that had now been rectified and he was confident that the target would be met this year.

The Committee discussed the £5.4m overspend within Children's Services which was largely attributable to the high numbers of looked after children within the borough. Members highlighted the fact that numbers had continued to rise and had ended at an all-time high of 529 by the end of March 2017. Asked how long it might be before numbers were reduced, Mr Thompson pointed out that on average, 30 new care admissions were made each month but this had recently dropped to 23. A number of new initiatives were underway under the leadership of the new Director of Children's Services, including more residential family placements, which were helping to reduce the overall

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numbers of looked after children. Members sought assurances that no children were being put at risk whilst the initiatives were underway to reduce the overall numbers of looked after children. Councillor Campbell explained that the efforts being undertaken would ensure the children were safe, whilst at the same time reducing the high numbers of children placed in care. She added further that no one within the Council would put a child at risk and such practice would never be accepted. The Chairman added that he was confident that the welfare of the children was being put first at all times.

Mr Paolo Pertica, Head of Visitors Services, indicated that as a result of his role on Bsafe Blackpool, he was aware that there had been a national upsurge of children being admitted to care and that the issue was not exclusive to Blackpool or the North West of the Country. This had occurred largely as a result of a small number of high profile failures in recent years and a tendency for the authorities to have adopted a more risk averse attitude. Councillor Campbell added that a gradual reduction in numbers was now hoped for, based upon current initiatives that were underway, although she was confident that all children who were currently placed in care, actually needed to be there.

The Committee went on to ask about the referrals process for children in care and questioned whether the current numbers of referrals being made were appropriate. Mr Pertica explained that currently, too many inappropriate referrals were being made, pointing out that on the basis of a risk averse approach, there has been a tendency to make referrals when alternative actions might have been considered more appropriate. For example, it may not be appropriate to undertake a full referral for a child who was considered to be within a safe family environment. He explained that work was being undertaken within the various agencies to reduce the amount of inappropriate referrals.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

Background papers: None.

7 TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN REPORT FOR YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2017

The Committee considered the Treasury Management Outturn report for the year ended 31 March 2017. The report was presented by Mr S. Thompson, Director of Resources who provided an overall summary of the situation within the report. In doing so, he indicated that the £185m in NET external loans was considered average for a Council such as Blackpool. He pointed out that there had been a £1.5m overall surplus within the revenue account, although cautioned that this was unlikely to be available during the current financial year due to budget cut requirements.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

Background papers: None.

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8 COMMUNITY SAFETY PERFORMANCE REPORT APRIL 2016 - MARCH 2017

The Committee considered a report which outlined the Community Safety Partnership's priorities between April 2016 and March 2017. The priorities discussed within the report were the Partnership priorities for 2016/2019: Violence Against The Person, Antisocial Behaviour, Domestic Abuse, Sexual Offences and Rape, and Child Sexual Exploitation. The report also made reference to other ongoing work such as Hate Crime, Counter Terrorism, Serious Organised Crime and Modern Day Slavery. The report was presented by Mr P. Pertica, Head of Visitors Services.

It was reported that during the period between 2004/2005 and 2014/2015, crime in Blackpool had consistently reduced year on year which created an extremely challenging baseline from which to achieve further reductions. Therefore, in 2015/2016 all crime had increased for the first time in a number of years partly due to this baseline, but also due to a change in emphasis around harm and risk. The shift in focus had actively encouraged victims to come forward and report crimes such as hate and sexual offences which, although presenting within the figures as an increase, was actually considered to be a positive outcome. The trend of increases in 2015/2016 continuing through 2016/2017 was also being seen across the County.

The report indicated that all crime in Blackpool for the period April 2016 to March 2017 was up by 12.4% compared to the previous year. The crime categories contributing to the majority of this increase were Violence Against the Person, up by 14.6% and Theft Offences (predominantly burglary and vehicle offences), up by 13.3%. Mr Pertica accepted that the overall situation was unfortunate and the current emphasis was being placed on attempting to reduce crime that was considered to be more harmful. The current priorities for the Safety Partnership were around domestic abuse and sexual offences. It was pointed out that for many years, domestic abuse incidents were not being recorded and that in recent years, there had been a high increase in reporting of sexual offences, largely due to a number of high profile historic cases. Over 30% of sexual offences reported recently were classed as non recent (over 1 year old).

Mr Pertica also pointed out that in the case of many of the categories of crime within the report, the figures in Blackpool had fallen in comparison with other areas.

The Committee asked about the reported increase of 40.5% relating to Sexual Offences on children aged under 16 and whether it would be possible to provide a further breakdown of figures. Mr Pertica explained that this was a difficult area to categorise and at the age 16 threshold, certain consensual activities which were illegal by statute at age under 16, would become legal.

In relation to the use of CCTV, the Committee asked that in future, whether it would be possible to include details of prosecutions where CCTV had been used, within the report. Councillor Campbell explained that unfortunately it would not be possible to include such information, as the authorities would not differentiate which prosecutions took place directly as a result of CCTV footage, as opposed to other means of evidence. Members agreed with Councillor Campbell that CCTV was still appreciated as an extremely valuable asset in the fight against crime.

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The Committee agreed to note the report.

Background papers: None.

9 BATHING WATER MANAGEMENT

The Committee considered a report which gave details of the delivery of the Council's statutory and other duties in respect of bathing water management. The report provided an outline of the various statutory duties including statistics, performance indicators and areas of concerns.

The report was presented by Mrs C. Nolan-Barnes, Head of Coastal and Environmental Partnership Investments. She reported that all statutory duties had been fulfilled and that an improvement in bathing water quality had been recorded, with the blue flag status being maintained at Blackpool South.

It was also reported that the current Action Plan was being reviewed and that United Utilities had continued to invest in Blackpool, which would hopefully add further to improvement in water quality.

The Committee asked if there had been any requests made to place waste water from the extraction of shale gas (fracking) into the open sea. Mrs Nolan-Barnes stated she was unaware of any such requests, but considered it highly unlikely due to the environmental dangers that would be associated with it. She agreed to find out more details of what would be the outcome for waste water from that process, and to report back in due course.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

Background papers: None.

10 FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT

The Committee considered a report which outlined the delivery of the Council's statutory duties in respect of flood risk management. The report provided an outline of the various statutory duties under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, including statistics, performance indicators and areas of concern. The report was presented by Mrs C. Nolan-Barnes, Head of Coastal and Environmental Partnership Investments, who provided the Committee with a summary of the report before responding to questions.

In relation to the short term action plan, the Committee noted that the requirement to develop a policy and process to undertake flood related works and to develop a policy to define how and when powers under Section 14a of The Land Drainage Act 1991 could be used, was not relevant to Blackpool as a single tier Authority and was being progressed by Lancashire County Council for its 12 district authorities. Asked if there was a risk management policy or process in place for this locally, Mrs Nolan-Barnes confirmed that Blackpool was still subject to the same legislation and would still have a requirement to comply.

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Mrs Nolan-Barnes pointed out that Blackpool Council was represented at the Environment Agency's North West Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, which was attended by Councillor Jackson, Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services. Councillor Jackson indicated the successes highlighted within the report and stated his wish to thank everyone involved in flood defence work and water quality. He stated that Blackpool would not be complacent and was working to achieve blue flag status across all of the town's beaches.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

Background papers: None.

11 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee considered its Workplan for the remainder of the current Municipal Year. The Chairman explained that it was a flexible, working document and he was open to suggestion from members for Workplan items at any time. He added that any issues raised by the Committee would be taken to the Workplan meetings which were held with Directors.

The Committee also considered the monitoring recommendations table which had been included, enabling Members to monitor progress on the implementation of scrutiny recommendations.

Members agreed that following the scrutiny review on Landaus that had taken place some time ago, it would now be timely to receive a report on the actions that had taken place, following the implementation of recommendations.

The Committee agreed:

1. To note the Workplan and scrutiny recommendations table.
2. To request an update report on the implementation of recommendations following the Landaus scrutiny review.

Background papers: None.

12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee agreed to note the date of the next meeting as Wednesday, 13 September 2017, at 6.00pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.17 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:

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