

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
WEDNESDAY, 13 SEPTEMBER 2017**

Present:

Councillor Hunter (in the Chair)

Councillors

G Coleman	Matthews	Ryan
Galley	Roberts	Singleton

In Attendance:

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

Councillor Mrs Christine Wright, Cabinet Member for Housing

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

Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Place

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Visitor Economy

Mr Val Watson, Delivery Development Officer

Mr Steve Sienkiewicz, Clerk to the Committee.

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 21 JUNE 2017

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting held on 21 June 2017 be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

3 PUBLIC SPEAKING

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

4 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

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

Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Place, responded to a request from the Committee for more information around decision number PH144/2017 'Board Nomination – Growth Lancashire Ltd'. He explained that the organisation was a development of the East Lancashire Partnership and it now had a similar role for the whole of Lancashire,

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providing advice to business in relation to developments and grants. Blackpool had agreed to membership on trial basis for one year and Councillor Smith was the nominated Board Member. Councillor Smith added that he had not yet attended any Board meetings.

With regard to decision number EX24/2017 'Transport for the North – Incorporation as a sub-national body', the Committee asked for further details as to its longer term aspirations. Mr Cavill explained that there was a prospectus for each of the five areas in Lancashire which set out the long term goals. In relation to specific questions about Blackpool North and Blackpool South railway stations, he explained that it was hoped that this would become integrated into the tram line and possibly have a passing loop installed in order to improve its capacity and appeal. For Blackpool North, improvements would be brought about as a result of the forthcoming electrification scheme, along with developments in relation to the new franchise holder, Arriva Trains Northern.

Councillor Mrs Wright, Cabinet Member for Housing, responded to questions from the Committee in relation to decision number EX26/2017 'Allocation of Social Housing'. She explained that the consultation would be very wide reaching and the Lettings Policy was also for the Fylde and Wyre areas. All parties involved had so far indicated that they were prepared to go ahead with the plan. She also provided confirmation that the Local Connection would not be changed as a result of the developments.

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

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the items contained within the Forward Plan, September 2017 – January 2018, relating to the portfolios of the Cabinet Members whose responsibilities fell within the remit of the Committee.

In relation to decision reference 3/2017 'Evaluation of the impact of the South Beach Selective Licensing Scheme and plans for regulation of housing in the area after the scheme ends', Councillor Wright confirmed that the scheme had ended in March 2017 and was now subject to an evaluation process. Asked when the results of that would be available, she explained that she anticipated availability around November 2017.

In connection with decision reference 21/2017 'Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone Masterplan', the Committee asked what changes could be expected following the sale of the airport to the Council and how the airport would be operated in the future. Councillor Smith explained that the Council would have more control of the development of the Enterprise Zone going forward. Councillor Campbell added that it was too soon to have specific details regarding the operation of the airport and that more information would be provided at the next meeting of full Council.

The Committee agreed to note the Forward Plan items.

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6 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE MONITORING AS AT MONTH 3 2017/2018

The Committee considered a report which detailed the level of spending against the Council's Revenue and Capital budgets for the first three months to 30 June 2017.

The report was presented by Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources who responded to questions from the Committee on the report's content.

In relation to Council Tax collection rates, the Committee pointed out that Blackpool had fallen behind other local authorities with whom it might be compared with in terms of deprivation levels and demographics, for example, Hull and Torbay. Asked if there was anything that could be learned from elsewhere in terms of best practice, Mr Thompson explained that as well as looking at what other Councils had been doing, the Council's Corporate Delivery Unit had been commissioned to carry out a review with a view to improvement being achieved in this area. He acknowledged that Blackpool compared unfavourably with other similar ranked Councils. He added that Blackpool had a shared service arrangement with Fylde Council and that Fylde's in-year collection rate using the same staff, systems and processes as Blackpool was 6% higher. He also pointed out that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme had had a major effect on collection levels and that other Councils had in fact increased their bottom-slice percentages. Pointing out that staffing levels in the Revenues Division had been low, Mr Thompson explained that Transformation funding was now being used to increase staff numbers which should result in an upturn in collection rates and yields.

The Committee asked about the high levels of demand within the Children's Services Directorate and whether there had been any reductions in terms of the numbers of looked after children. Mr Thompson explained that there had now been three successive months of reductions in terms of both numbers and costs.

In terms of the wider financial strategy, the Committee asked how the Council was performing in terms of the overall target. Mr Thompson suggested that although the signs were encouraging, it would be premature to make any sort of assessment at this stage.

Asked how the Business Loan Fund was performing, Mr Thompson explained that a Business Loan Fund Panel met on a monthly basis and had so far approved three loan applications. From a target of £60m this year, two thirds of that amount had been committed to date and a great deal of work was being carried out to achieve the full target. He further explained that more work would be carried out on the marketing side going forward.

In terms of rental income from the Central Business District, the Committee asked whether it was now time to consider a change in the strategy with regard to rent levels in order to attract higher levels of occupied properties. Mr Thompson explained his belief that it was important to hold the line with current rents. He spoke of the fine balance in terms of attaining a critical mass for such premium units and not devaluing them and informed the Committee that there was currently a number of expressions of interest being considered.

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Members asked about the £36.7m one-off payment made to the Lancashire County Council Pension Fund. Mr Thompson explained that Blackpool had been given an opportunity to make the payment to attract a discount in relation to the next three years' historic deficit and future service rates. The payment would benefit both the Pension Fund and the Council's Revenue Fund.

The Committee asked whether the reduction in the Education Services Grant within the Children's Services Directorate was fair in relation to Blackpool. Mr Thompson explained that the grant levels had been reduced across the country and was therefore not unique to Blackpool.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

Background papers: None.

7 COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT Q1 2017/2018 - VISITOR AND CULTURAL ECONOMY

The Committee considered a report which outlined performance against the Council Plan 2015-2020 in relation to the theme of Visitor and Cultural Economy.

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Visitor Economy responded to questions from the Committee in connection with the report. Asked about the number of visitors who stayed overnight in the resort for more than one night, he agreed to find out that information and report back in due course.

The Committee discussed the wording of the report, particularly around the visitor numbers growth rates over the last three years. Mr Welsh acknowledged the Committee's request for a more simplified set of figures to be applied within future reports.

The Committee asked for more details about the Blackpool Resort Pass, with Members expressing their thoughts that it was one of the main incentives for encouraging people to stay for longer than a one day visit in the resort. Mr Welsh explained the duration and benefits of the pass, as well as the different versions that were available in terms of accessing visitor attractions at reduced rates.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

Background papers: None.

8 TOURISM PERFORMANCE REPORT

Following a suggestion by Councillor Campbell, Members agreed that it was not the optimum time of year to be considering this report, particularly as the resort was just entering into the Illuminations period.

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The Committee agreed:

1. To defer consideration of this item.
2. To amend the Committee Workplan for this report to be considered in December 2017 and then again in June 2018.

Background papers: None.

9 PARKING SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee considered a report which provided information on the performance data of Council owned and managed car parks and on street parking for 2016/2017, together with a certain amount of information relating to the first four months of the 2017/2018 period.

The Committee asked whether the reduction in car park spaces due to other developments would have an impact on the target figures. Councillor Smith explained that there were real concerns as a result of the developments and that the Council was looking for opportunities where spaces could be maximised and therefore revenue maintained or increased, going forward.

Members asked questions about the proposed improvements to Bank Street car park and whether there had been any progress on the plans to demolish a building to provide a better link to the town centre. Mr Cavill explained that Network Rail had agreed to the works being carried out, although it was necessary to wait until the line blockade had commenced in November before works could start. He added that the car park should be provided with an entrance from High Street in 2018.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

10 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 suggestions from Members for Workplan items at any time.

The Committee agreed to note the content of the Workplan and to make the amendment as agreed in relation to agenda item 8 of this report.

Background papers: None.

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee agreed to note the date of the next meeting as Wednesday, 25 October 2017, at 6.00pm.

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Chairman

(The meeting ended at 18:50)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:

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