

# **Appendix 3a: Night Time Economy Working Group Interim Report**

**December 2014**

## **Introduction**

In February 2014, as part of its decision not to recommend an Early Morning Restriction Order, the Licensing Committee did recommend that the Council create a working group to consider all of the issues that were of concern in the night time economy in Blackpool.

At its first meeting in July 2014 the NTEWG agreed that the theme of the working group would be “improving the perception of Blackpool”. Two sub-groups were set up, one focusing on crime, disorder and public safety and the other on improving the early evening economy. The main Working Group also felt that it was important to conduct a survey to ascertain what the perceptions of Blackpool actually were.

The sub-groups met on a number of occasions to hear representations from a wide range of people and groups.

This report is an interim report to the Licensing Committee and it is hoped that a final report from the Night Time Economy Working Group will be submitted in the New Year.

## **Perceptions Survey**

During the course of the EMRO hearing it became apparent that Blackpool town centre did suffer from significant levels of violent crime and disorder which needed addressing to improve people’s perception of the town. Given the theme of the working group was “improving the perception of Blackpool”, the group felt that it was important that a representative survey be undertaken to discover the actual opinions of residents and those in nearby boroughs.

It was agreed that two types of survey be undertaken.

The first is a survey open to anyone who wishes to take part. This survey consisted of a series of open-ended questions. The questionnaire asks whether the individual uses the town centre, what their perceptions are and what things could be done to improve the town. This survey is being publicised on social media and is completed on-line. Libraries do have paper copies of the questionnaire. The survey has had 250 responses to date (this figure does not include the paper responses at the libraries which will not be collected until the survey closes)

A preliminary analysis of the responses received already reveals the following perceptions:

- The town centre was untidy with low quality retailers and an increasing number of vacant premises
- The early evening was quiet and uninviting with a limited offer for residents and visitors
- The late night economy was a place of vertical drinking establishments, drunken rowdiness and minor criminality

Suggestions for improvements include:

- More street cleaning
- CCTV
- Reduced price/free parking
- Improved entertainment and dining options in the early evening.

The second survey is a telephone survey which is designed to obtain responses from a representative sample of residents in Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre.

The fieldwork will be completed in December. The comments received will then need to be analysed and a report written. This report will be available in January 2015.

## **Review of Statement of Licensing Policy**

One of the areas of feedback from the EMRO hearing was that there had not been enough use of the current legislation to deal with alcohol related problems in the night time economy. A review of good practice relating to Statement of Licensing Policies from other Authorities was undertaken and the main Working Group considered some relevant changes to the Blackpool policy at its December meeting. These included setting down a framework of what was expected from applicants and what was regarded as standard practice to be able to hold to account operators who had been called in for review. The Group also support plans to promote and make easier the process of asking for a review.

A revised Statement of Licensing Policy is being brought to the Licensing Committee separately.

## **Issues identified by the sub-groups**

Representations made to both sub-groups have identified that a variety of high quality well managed venues are a key factor in improving the perception of Blackpool and encouraging people to enjoy the night time economy in a responsible manner.

Providing a vibrant and diverse early evening economy is a more complex issue as retailers and food venues will not open unless there is the footfall to make it financially worthwhile, however, people will not use the town centre unless there is something for them to do. With the Council relocating

large numbers of staff to a central location at Bickerstaffe House, there are more people than ever before that can be encouraged to stay and use the town centre after work thereby providing the footfall necessary to revitalise the early evening economy.

Without the results of the perceptions survey it is not possible to say with any certainty what the actual perception of Blackpool is. The work of the group has identified a number of issues that need consideration. Some are relatively simple to achieve and others are more costly/time consuming.

### Zones

Blackpool aims to have a mixed and vibrant nightlife. For this to work effectively there needs to be a quieter zone where families and other groups can eat and socialise separate from a more lively, adult orientated area. This need for effective zoning has been identified by both sub-groups. Zoning would be a longer term strategy for managing expectations and changing the perceptions of the town.

### CCTV

Again a common theme identified by both sub-groups. A monitored CCTV system is of assistance to the police in preventing and detecting crime. It also makes people feel safe.

Whilst the infrastructure is in place, funding **is no longer available** at the moment for the system to be monitored.

### Quality of premises

Whilst there are good operators in the town not all venues are operated to the same high standards. The licensed trade believe that either the reintroduction of the Best Bar None Scheme or the creation of a similar more bespoke scheme for Blackpool would reward good operators and encourage improvement in others.

### Taxi Marshalls

The taxi trade highlighted the need for taxi marshalls in key areas of the town centre, especially at the weekends. Their presence on the street would deter bad behaviour. Careful planning would be needed about when and where they would be deployed.

### First aiders in licensed premises

To reduce the burden on the ambulance service, trained first responders could be nominated in the major pubs and clubs in the town centre. They would deal with minor incidents referring people to the safe haven and ambulance as appropriate.

### Street Lighting

Lighting in some areas of the town was identified as an issue.

### Marketing

Many of the small independent restaurants and shops have limited budgets for advertising. Advertising the fact that they are open during the many events that take place during the year is often not possible. There is a need to explore the options for joint marketing campaigns.

### Family friendly entertainment and dining options

Work needs to be done to improve the variety of family friendly entertainment and dining options available in the town centre.

## **Funding**

Many of the improvements suggested require funding.

## **Actions taken**

Defective street lighting in Clifton Street has been fixed. Discussions are taking place with the Illuminations team to see how lighting can be further improved. Lighting around the Safe Haven has also been improved.

Community first responders as suggested by the Ambulance Service are going to be trained and available in Market Street, Flamingo and Club Domain. Pubwatch are going to try to provide a public access defibrillator through industry donations.

## **Initiatives still requiring further consideration**

### **Late Night Levy/ Renewal of the BiD**

It was noted by the Group that a number of Authorities (Newcastle, Southampton, Nottingham, Islington etc.) had now moved to a Late Night Levy. This had helped regulate some late night operation but had also brought in further income to help with issues such as street cleaning, CCTV, taxi marshals etc. The Group also noted that the Blackpool Improvement District term was due to finish in November 2015 and agreed that any proposals for its renewal should be looked at in particular with the late night economy.

The Group has agreed to look at these initiatives in more detail to see if they would add value to the late night economy, although it was noted that full consideration of these maybe a long term project.

### **Licensed Premises Accreditation scheme**

Whilst the trade would welcome the reintroduction of “Best Bar None”, the Police and the authority are of the opinion that this particular scheme can be very resource intensive. Other areas that have implemented accreditation schemes have reported that standards have improved and crime and disorder reduced. Rather than adopt a scheme that is already in existence it is possible for Blackpool to design a bespoke scheme tailored to its individual needs.

### **Purple Flag accreditation**

The Purple Flag accreditation scheme aims to raise the standard and broaden the appeal of town centres at night. A town centre that is awarded a purple flag will be safe, vibrant, appealing, well-managed and offer a positive experience to customers.

Benefits of achieving Purple Flag are:

- An improved public image
- Increased expenditure

- Wider patronage
- Lower crime and anti-social behaviour
- A more successful mixed use economy

Suitability for Purple Flag is assessed over five themes:

- Wellbeing – providing a safe, clean, welcoming environment
- Movement – ensuring that people can arrive, move round the town and get home safely
- Appeal – providing a vibrant choice of entertainment and activity that appeals to a variety of ages
- Place – an over-concentration of similar night-time venues can damage the image of an area
- Policy Envelope – policy making with a clear aim and a common purpose.

If obtaining purple flag accreditation is set as a long term aim, the journey towards achieving that aim could provide significant benefits.