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MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2018

Present:

Councillor Hunter (in the Chair)

Councillors

Callow

D Coleman

Galley

Mitchell

Mrs Callow JP

Critchley

Humphreys

Ryan

In Attendance:

Ms Clare Nolan Barnes, Head of Coastal and Environmental Partnership Investments

Mr John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services

Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communication and Regeneration

Mr John Hawkin, Chief Operating Officer, Community and Environmental Services

Ms Judith Mills, Public Health Consultant, Public Health

Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications

Ms Ruth Henshaw, Delivery Development Officer

Mr John Greenbank, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser (Scrutiny)

Councillor Simon Blackburn, Leader of the Council

Councillor Fred Jackson, Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Highways

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

Councillor Mrs Christine Wright, Cabinet Member for Housing

Ms Katy Duffy, Drainage Asset Manager, Unities Utilities

Mr Andrew Kendall, Area Business Manager, United Utilities

Mr Steven Kenyan, Network Manager, United Utilities

Mr Paul Bond, Flood Resilience Adviser, Environment Agency

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2018

The Committee considered the minutes of the 12 September 2018 meeting.

Councillor Mitchell requested an amendment to Minute 5, Cabinet Member and Executive Decisions, regarding Cabinet Member decision PH41/2018, the rescheduling of an existing loan from the Blackpool Business Loans Fund. He asked that it be included that this had been an urgent decision where the call-in period had been waived. Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communication and Regeneration, also confirmed that the name of the organisation receiving the loan would be made available.

Subject to the above amendment the Committee agreed to approve the minutes as a true and correct record.

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3 FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT

The Committee considered a report regarding investigations by the Council and United Utilities (UU) into the 22 November 2018 flooding in Blackpool.

The Chairman welcomed Ms Katy Duffy, Drainage Asset Manager, Unities Utilities, Mr Andrew Kendall, Area Business Manager, United Utilities, Mr Steven Kenyan, Network Manager, United Utilities and Mr Paul Bond, Flood Resilience Adviser, Environment Agency to the meeting.

Ms Duffy presented the findings of the investigation conducted by UU into the flooding incident. The methods of drainage of surface and sewer water were explained to Members, outlining that watercourses in the north of Blackpool drained into the Fylde Tunnel System. The flooding of 22 November 2017 was attributed to the unexpected nature of the weather event and described as a once in 64 year storm. Ms Duff also explained that the ground and sewer system had been saturated by previous rainfall which created hydraulic issues with the drainage of surface water on the night. Combined with the flat nature of some of the watercourses this meant that once the ground had become saturated and the sewer had reached capacity the flood waters could not drain.

It was also stated that the area remained at high risk of future flooding if a similar weather event occurred.

Members asked if the pumps at the Anchorsholme pumping station could have been manually activated earlier to mitigate the worse of the flooding. Mr Kendall explained that the pumps worked automatically and would only work once the sewer and connected wet wells were full. This had happened at around 2am on 23 November 2017, although it was recognised that one of the five pumps at the station had tripped and not functioned.

The Committee queried if the existing water in the sewer system could have been discharged into the sea before the night of 22 November 2017 or when it had become clear that a significant amount of rain was falling. Mr Kenyon responded that the UU required permission from the Environment Agency (EA) to discharge sewer water into the sea, and confirmed that permission had not been sought during the night of the 22 November 2017. Members went on to ask why this had been the case and questioned if a financial motive had led to the decision not to discharge. In response Mr Kendall advised that discharging sewer water into the sea required a permit regulated by the EA. UU had a permit, the conditions of which required them to seek authorisation from EA for any discharge. Failure to seek permission would result in UU suffering disciplinary action which could include a financial penalty. It was further added that although UU had not requested permission to discharge water from Anchorsholme Pumping Station, permission had been sought and received from EA to discharge water held at Skippool Pumping Station. It was explained that this course of action was undertaken to relieve pressure on Anchorsholme Pumping Station as waters from Skippool Pumping Station were drained into it.

It was further reported that directors from UU would be meeting with representatives

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from EA to discuss the procedures for discharging water into the sea, with a view to increasing the amounts permitted.

Discussion also took place around why the level of rainfall had not been foreseen by either UU or EA on the 22 November 2017. Mr Kenyon advised that the Met Office had predicted that the bulk of the rainfall approaching the North West on that date would fall in Cumbria and had lifted a weather warning for Blackpool earlier in the day. Mr Bond added that the EA had not received a warning of a weather event of the scale experienced.

The Committee also asked if the failure of one of the five pumps at the Anchorsholme Pumping Station had contributed to the scale of the flooding. And cited correspondence from Paul Maynard MP which indicated that the failure of the pump had meant that the flooding was worse than if it had been operational. Mr Kenyon responded that this was potentially correct but more work would be needed to understand the capacity of the pumps under similar conditions to be confident that this had been the case.

Members also questioned why it was that incorrect information had been given out by UU workers on the night of the flooding, such as incorrectly stating that pump stations were the responsibility of Blackpool Council. Mr Kenyon responded that there were pumps in and around Blackpool operated by the EA and Lancashire County Council and not UU, but that he accepted that some of the information given out on the night of the flooding was unhelpful.

The Chairman invited Mr Colin Wolfendale to address the Committee regarding his experience of the flooding and the events that followed. Mr Wolfendale explained that he was attending on behalf of his daughter and her family who had been forced to leave their home as a result of the flooding. He highlighted a number of points regarding United Utilities actions following the 22 November 2017, including; delays in responding to queries, perceived attempts to lay responsibility for the flooding on other agencies and the time it had taken to investigate and implement improvements. He also raised the issue the financial cost to residents of the flooding including increased insurance premiums.

Following this the Chairman also invited Mr Paul Hewitt to address the Committee. Mr Hewitt explained that he was attending to represent local residents affected by the flooding. He highlighted what many local people regarded as poor communication from UU during the flooding and raised concerns that UU had misled people regarding the events that had occurred. He also questioned why UU engineers had attended the Anchorsholme Pumping Station on the night of the flood despite reassurances that the pumps were working.

Mr Bond gave short update to the Committee on the work EA had undertaken following the flooding, including a community drop in event on 18 July 2018 to discuss flooding issues with residents. He reported that feedback from the event had been generally positive. The Committee was also informed that EA had set up a Flood Hub website to provide information and useful links to residents and business owners affected by or at risk of flooding.

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Following consideration of the information presented to the Committee, it was recommended that the following information be included in the final Section 19 report into the flooding of 22 November 2017;

- Evidence of the impact of the failure of one of the five pumps at Anchorsholme Pumping Station;
- Examination of the mechanism used to predict weather; and
- A break-down of what work had been undertaken since 22 November 2018 2017 to give assurance that a similar event would not happen again.

It was also requested that guidance on flood insurance for residents be issued by United Utilities and the Environment Agency, including who they could formally complain to and how to do so.

The Committee further emphasised that agencies involved in responding to the flooding of 22 November 2017 had lost the trust of the local community and that they needed to work hard to regain it and ensure that there was not a recurrence.

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 on 12 September 2018.

Members welcomed Executive Decision EX40/2018 regarding the undertaking of a consultation on the proposal to designate Marton Moss a conservation area. It was queried how the Council intended to monitor the proposed area if established. Councillor Blackburn, Leader of the Council, responded that the Council would work with local residents and encourage reporting of any breaches that may occur. The Committee also asked what benefit there would be in the proposals to designate the North Promenade a conservation area. Councillor Blackburn explained that the North Promenade had a number of hotels and buildings that shared a unique architectural style unseen in other towns in the north of England and that a conservation area would help to protect this.

Cabinet Member Decision PH69/2018 was also discussed. Members queried the consultation that had taken place and expressed the importance of Blackpool remaining a dog-friendly place to visit. Councillor Blackburn respond that the consultation had set out a wide range of option for possible control orders, but it was not intended that all would be taken up. He also recognised the importance of continuing to attract visitors and stated that the Council would continue to work with dog owners to make the town more dog-friendly.

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the content of the Council's Forward Plan November 2018 to March 2019, relating to the portfolios of Cabinet Members whose responsibilities fell within its remit.

The Committee queried how much remained in the Business Loan Fund. In response Councillor Blackburn explained that approximately £10m remained but emphasised the

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amount in the Fund in the future would depend on the Council desire to continue to make funds available.

6 GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

The Committee received a presentation from John Hawkins, Chief Operating Officer, Community and Environmental Services and Judith Mills, Public Health Consultant, Public Health, on the draft Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy.

It was explained that the strategy would be considered by all of the Council's Scrutiny Committees during November 2018 during which nominations would be sought from each Committee for three Members to sit on a task and finish group to input into the strategy and its action plan.

The Strategy aimed to improve Blackpool's open spaces as well as delivering new green spaces across the town. It was explained that this would bring health benefits to the residents of the town as well as making it more attractive to business and tourism.

Although the Council did not control all of the green spaces in Blackpool it was envisioned that it should play a leading role with various partners including businesses and community groups in delivering on the ambitions within the strategy.

Members welcomed the aims of the Strategy but queried how the improvement would be funded. In response Mr Hawkin explained that although the Council would not be able to fund all the changes to open spaces itself it could support other groups already active in the town to raise funds and/or provide money. Mr John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services, explained that the strategy was a statement of the Council's ambition to improve the town and that it was important that this was agreed before looking to secure funding to achieve it.

The Committee also discussed the importance of educating young people and children on the importance of green spaces. Members, while recognising the good work undertaken in schools, such as forest schools, considered that work should also be undertaken with children as young as nursery age to embed the importance of a green environment.

The Chairman invited volunteers to sit on the proposed task and finish group, following which it was agreed that Councillors Coleman, Galley and Ryan participate in the group.

7 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE MONITORING AS AT MONTH 5 2018/2019

Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources, presented the Financial Monitoring Report to the Committee.

Members were informed that the Council would be overspent as at the end of month 5 by approximately £4m. This was attributed chiefly to the overspend in Children's Services, particularly relating to the large number of Looked After Children the Council was responsible for. Work was ongoing to manage the overspend with Children's Services but it was recognised that it was a complex issue and that Blackpool was currently performing better than the national average. The Committee was informed that an overall overspend

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of £3m was being targeted by the year end, which would be covered by reserves.

Mr Thompson also informed the Committee that revenue collection rates were positive with an increase in the amounts collected in Council Tax and no decrease in the amount collected from Business Rates despite some successful rating appeals and a couple of large businesses in the town going into administration.

In response to a query from Members it was explained that the Council could not easily predict new demand for children in care when calculating the budget and so based figures on the actual numbers currently looked after. Mr Thompson explained that if the budget was allocated based on an over-estimate funds could go unspent that could have been more effectively deployed on other Council services.

8 REPORTING THE USE OF EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS 2017/2018

Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources, presented the annual report on the use of external consultants during 2017/2018. It was stated that the largest number of external consultants had been used in connection with the Tramway Extension and the Museum projects and to comply with external grant funding eligibility criteria.

9 TOURISM PERFORMANCE UPDATE

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications, introduced the Tourism Performance Update which provided provide information on tourism performance and trends using various indicators including number of visits, the value of the visitor economy and number of jobs supported, footfall on the Promenade and town centre, car parking; tram usage and satisfaction ratings.

Members agreed that the update be noted.

10 ANNUAL CUSTOMER FEEDBACK REPORT 2017/2018

Members considered the Annual Customer Feedback Report 2017/2018.

A query was raised as to the nature of the six formal complaints mentioned in the report that had been upheld by the Local Government Ombudsman. Ms Ruth Henshaw, Delivery Development Officer, responded that she could not provide the information at the meeting but would investigate and make it available to the Committee following the meeting.

11 BUDGET SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL

The Committee considered proposals to establish a Budget Scrutiny Review Panel to scrutinise the 2019/2020 Budget.

It was explained that the Panel would meet with senior Council officers and Cabinet Members in December 2018 to consider budget proposals and make recommendations to the February 2019 meeting of the Executive. Membership of the Panel would be appointed by the Leaders of the Labour and Conservative groups.

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The Committee agreed the proposal to establish a Budget Scrutiny Review Panel.

12 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee agreed to note the Scrutiny Workplan.

13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted the date and time of the next meeting as 23 January 2019, commencing at 6.00pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 8.40 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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