

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 2020**

Present:

Councillor Mitchell (in the Chair)

Councillors

Burdess

Galley

Jackson

Walsh

G Coleman

Hugo

Owen

Wilshaw

In Attendance:

Councillor Lynn Williams, Leader of the Council

Councillor Gillian Campbell, Cabinet Member for Tourism and Place

Councillor Jim Hobson, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment

Councillor Maria Kirkland, Cabinet Member of Community Cohesion and Leisure

Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member Business, Enterprise and Job Creation

Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration (Items 1-5 only)

Lisa Arnold, Head of Leisure Services (Items 1-7 only)

Nick Gerard, Growth and Prosperity Programme Director (Items 1-6 only)

Scott Butterfield, Strategy, Policy and Research Manager

John Greenbank, 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 5 FEBRUARY 2020

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the 5 February 2020 meeting of the Tourism, Economy and Communities, Scrutiny Committee be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

3 PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Committee noted that there were no applications to speak by members of the public on this occasion.

4 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Executive and Cabinet Member decisions taken, within its remit, since the last meeting of the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee on 5 February 2020.

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Members queried Cabinet Member Decision PH08/2020 regarding Kerbside Green Waste collection charges. It was noted that there had been an increase of £5 for the collection of green waste and the Committee asked why this had been the case. Councillor Jim Hobson, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment, responded that the decision had been taken by the previous responsible Cabinet Member and that they would be able to provide a written response to the query.

The Committee also queried if, in respect of PH16/2020, an announcement regarding the Nickelodeon Slimefest event for 2020 had been made. Councillor Gillian, Cabinet Member for Tourism and Place, confirmed that Nickelodeon had announced that the Slimefest event would not be taking place during 2020.

Plans for William Lyons House, following its purchase outlined in the decision PH17/2020, were also queried by Members of the Committee. Councillor Lynn Williams, Leader of the Council, explained that the original intention was to use the property to house care leavers. However in response to the Covid-19 lockdown and the need to protect vulnerable people the property had instead been used as emergency accommodation.

Members also queried PH21/2020, Parking Fees and Charges 2020/2021, asking if the reduction in usage of the town centre during lockdown meant that the agreed charges would need to be revised. Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Job Creation, responded that there had been reduced enforcement during the lockdown and that Council staff had been allowed to use town centre car park free of charge. However he also stated that there were no current plans to reduce parking charges. The Committee further queried if the introduction of free parking could encourage more people back into the town centre to help support it. Councillor Smith replied that it was apparent that free parking would not help support the town centre as experience had shown that it would mainly be utilised by those already working in the town rather than visitors. Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration added that revenue from car parking had increased and that officers welcomed any suggestions to improve the service.

The Committee referred to the decision to remove pre-application charges for significant major applications outlined at PH23/2020, Planning Fees and Charges 2020/2021. Mr Cavill explained the rate for planning fees were set nationally and that the purpose of removing the charge was intended to encourage developers to talk to the Council prior to submitting planning applications.

The Committee also asked if an update could be provided on the proposal to relocate the Courts following the Purchase of Land at Devonshire Road outlined at decision EX24/2020. Mr Nick Gerard, Growth and Prosperity Programme Director, responded that the site had been bought for the relocation and that discussions with the Courts and Tribunal Service were ongoing and that it was planned that the relocation would take place to enable the final stage of the Blackpool Central Scheme in due course.

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5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the contents of the Council's Forward Plan September 2020 to December 2020, relating to the portfolios of Cabinet Members whose responsibilities fell within its remit.

Members asked what if any promotional work had been undertaken to market the Business Loans Fund. The Committee had noted that information regarding the fund was not available on the Council's website or social media. Councillor Smith responded that this was an issue that the Council would look at.

The Committee also asked what criteria had been used to designate Layton as a potential conservation area. Mr Cavill replied that the area was regarded as one with buildings and a layout of historic interest that should be preserved. Members further asked if other areas of Blackpool had been considered as conservation areas, in response Mr Cavill stated that other areas of the town could be considered.

Mr Cavill left the meeting following this item.

6 TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION UPDATE

The Committee received an update on progress on the various projects being undertaken to secure the regeneration of Blackpool Town Centre following the last update in October 2019, and details of planned future work.

Members asked if the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown, including greater homeworking, meant that plans for new offices in the town centre were no longer viable. Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Job Creation, responded that the Council had an aspiration for a first class office space within the town but that any office development would be built to the specification of an occupier once they had signed a lease. Mr Gerard, Growth and Prosperity Programme Director added that a potential occupier was still in negotiations with the Council to build new office accommodation having reviewed and confirmed their requirements in a post Covid-19 scenario.

The Committee noted that the report recognised that securing community support for urban regeneration was an important part of making it successful and asked if any public engagement exercise had been undertaken. Mr Gerard informed Members that a major public consultation had been undertaken as part of the application for a Town Deal. The results of this had been published on the Council website and would be retained going forward. He also confirmed that such engagement would continue as an important part of Blackpool's regeneration. The Committee welcomed this information and asked that officer continue to let the public know of such work.

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Members asked if more details could be provided regarding the proposal to build a boutique hotel in Blackpool. Mr Gerard replied that an opportunity for such a hotel had been identified following a commercial assessment. A boutique hotel would be a unique themed hotel, and it was suggested that the theme could be the town's entertainment history.

The Committee also asked why the Blackpool Museum had employed the number of consultants it had. Mr Gerard replied that each consultant employed had been done so to provide advice on a specific area and that their work was monitored by the Museum Trust's Board.

The use of funding from the Future High Street Fund (FHSF) exclusively in the town centre instead of other areas of Blackpool was queried by the Committee. Councillor Smith, responded that the criteria for bids to the FHSF required any money received to be spent in the town centre. Mr Gerard added that the money received as part of the Town Deal would be spent in schemes across Blackpool as a whole. Consultation had also been undertaken with the public to identify the key themes for future investment in the town.

Member questioned what the proposed 'Multiversity' development was and what benefits it would bring to Blackpool. Mr Gerard replied that the 'Multiversity' would bring a broad range of educational opportunities into the town centre, in conjunction with Blackpool and Fylde College. He added that a tender had been issued for the first stage of work on the project for a Masterplan and Delivery Plan and that it was hoped that some funding would be provided as part of the Town Deal.

Mr Gerard left the meeting following this item.

7 LEISURE SERVICES UPDATE

Ms Lisa Arnold, Head of Leisure Services, presented the Leisure Services update to the Committee, which highlighted the services performance since last update in 2019.

The Committee asked if the Covid-19 lockdown had impacted on the business cases for any of the works outlined in the report, in particular those at the Palatine Leisure Centre. Ms Arnold replied that the finance for the works at the centre was included in the services budget and therefore the lockdown had not meant that the work would be financially unviable. She added that the forced closure of the Palatine Leisure Centre and other facilities by lockdown had presented an opportunity to undertake major renovation and upgrade works. Ms Arnold also reported that income from memberships had remained steady during lockdown, with some memberships having been frozen but other new ones being taken out. However it had been noted that reduced footfall could be a challenge going forward.

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Members also noted that there had been considerable investment in the Blackpool Football Development Plan and queried if consideration had been given to investment in other sports to encourage the broadest number of young people into them. Ms Arnold responded that the funding for the plan had been linked to football but that generally the Council had moved away from sport specific projects to promote the widest possible engagement in physical activity.

It was noted that the Committee would be holding a joint Review Panel meeting with the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee to input into the draft Active Lives Strategy on 25 September 2020. Ms Arnold reported that the strategy would include greater details of work to engage with young people.

Ms Arnold left the meeting following this item.

8 CLIMATE EMERGENCY DECLARATION RESPONSE

Mr Scott Butterfield, Strategy, Policy and Research Manager, presented the Climate Emergency Update which provided Members with details of work undertaken to address the Council's Declaration of a Climate Emergency.

Mr Butterfield reported that the Covid-19 lockdown had delayed work but that significant progress had been made against the Climate Emergency Action Plan and that a strong foundation had been made with the Council's agreement to fund and a tender being sent out for the establishment of a Citizen's Assembly, to be held before Christmas 2020. A piece of work to map out what reductions in carbon emissions the Council would need to make to achieve its goals for both the organisation and town had also commenced. Work was also underway to improve the staffing resource to support the climate emergency work, with a dedicated post being established.

The Committee queried if officers and the Cabinet Member were confident that finances would be available to fund work going forward. Councillor Hobson, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment, replied that the Executive recognised the work being undertaken was in response to an emergency and that it would be treated as such, with appropriate funding secured in future budgets.

Members also questioned if consideration had been given to the use of urban wind technology to reduce Blackpool's carbon footprint. It was also asked if any work could be undertaken with Lancaster University to develop new ways of thinking in relation to energy generation. Mr Butterfield replied that the Council was in contact with Lancaster University and that a list of experts to assist with climate emergency work had been provided by them. He also explained that one of the most significant challenges in reducing the Council's carbon footprint was de-carbonising Blackpool's housing stock. Councillor Hobson added that the work on the Council's Planning Policy was due for review and that the climate emergency would be taken into consideration as part of that. Councillor Williams, Leader of the Council, also stated that the Council was committed to addressing the emergency and that every part of it would be looking at ways to operate in greener ways.

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The Committee agreed that it would receive a further update on progress in six months.

9 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee considered the Scrutiny Workplan report and update on work undertaken by the Active Lives Review and Adopt and Alley Review Panels

Members asked that the following items be added to the Scrutiny Workplan for 2020-2021:

- Arts and Culture;
- Economic Development; and
- Local Government Reform, including proposals for a combined authority

The Committee noted the Scrutiny Workplan report, associated updates and agreed to add these items to the Scrutiny Workplan 2020-2021.

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Committee was confirmed as Wednesday, 18 November 2020 at 6.00pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.40 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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