

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 15 OCTOBER 2015**

Present:

Councillor Hunter (in the Chair)

Councillors

Mrs Callow JP

G Coleman

Roberts

L Williams

D Coleman

Galley

Rowson

Matthews

In Attendance:

Councillor Gillian Campbell

Councillor Fred Jackson

Councillor Mrs Christine Wright

Councillor Mark Smith

Carmel McKeogh, Deputy Chief Executive

Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

Alan Cavill, Director of Place

Andrew Foot, Housing, Planning & Transport

Paolo Pertica, Head of Visitors Services

Moya Foster, Senior Service Manager, Families in Need

Lorraine Hurst, Head of Democratic Governance

Terry Hall, Health and Safety Manager

Chris Kelly, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser (Scrutiny)

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors who was on official Council business.

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Galley declared a personal interest with regard to item 6, 'Financial Performance Monitoring as at Month 4 2015/2016', the nature of the interest being that he was a Board Member of Blackpool Transport Services Limited'.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 10 SEPTEMBER 2015

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the Tourism, Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10 September 2015, be signed by the Chairman as a 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

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The Committee considered the Executive and Cabinet Member decisions within the portfolios of the Leader of the Council and Deputy Leader of the Council, taken since the last meeting of the Committee.

With regards to decision number PH56/2015, 'Litter Campaign in conjunction with Keep Britain Tidy' Members noted the aspiration to become Britain's cleanest seaside resort and questioned how that aspiration would be measured and whether the strategy for a 'litter free Blackpool' would involve an increase in the number of fixed penalty notices imposed on offenders.

Councillor Campbell advised that the methods for measuring improvement would be considered as part of developing the strategy in conjunction with Keep Britain Tidy. The strategy development would also involve consultation with residents and businesses in the town regarding its objectives. Mrs Campbell also advised that with regard to enforcement, offenders would first receive a warning and then a fixed penalty notice if they failed to pick up their litter. However, a significant aspect of the strategy would be to increase awareness and educate visitors and residents that littering was unacceptable. As part of educating residents, there would be an engagement with Blackpool schools.

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

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the items contained within the Forward Plan, November 2015 – February 2016, relating to the portfolios of the Leader of the Council and Deputy Leader of the Council.

Members raised questions regarding details that related to 'The introduction of a new selective and additional licensing scheme for the Central area of Blackpool' (reference 22/2015). In response, Councillor Campbell advised that the scheme could not make any profit and any money raised was required to be re-invested in the scheme. Members also discussed how the success of the scheme was measured, with specific regard to the challenges involved with monitoring crime figures in light of changes to how those figures were recorded. It was considered important that the scheme be able to evidence its successes, in order for it to be continued in future.

The Committee also raised questions in relation to decision 'Review of Business rates and Council Tax discounts and premiums' (reference 26/2015) and it was reported by Mr Thompson, Director of Resources, that the review would take place as part of the budget setting process.

The Committee agreed to note the Forward Plan items.

6 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE MONITORING AS AT MONTH 4 2015/2016

Mr Thompson presented the Financial Performance Monitoring Report as at month 4. The Committee was advised that the report was the standard monthly financial performance monitoring report that set out the summary revenue budget position for the

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Council and its individual directorates for month 4, the period April 2015 – July 2015, together with an outlook for the remainder of the year. He explained that the report also included an assessment of progress to date against the latest capital programme, incorporated the balance sheet, indicated the level of cash flow and contained information relating to income and debt collection.

Mr Thompson provided Members with details of the Business rates and Council Tax collection rates. Members were advised that the Council Tax collection rate was currently at the same level as it had been last year. He advised that he expected an in-year collection rate of between 92-93% and the target collection rate over a five year collection period was 98%.

Responding to questions from Members, Mr Thompson advised that every service area caused concern in relation to their resilience to further expected budget cuts. He noted that the largest overspend was in relation to Children's Services, of which a significant factor was due to the placements of a high number of looked after children in the borough. Members noted the work being undertaken to reduce the number of children being looked after and the drive to find suitable, internal foster placements.

Mr Thompson reported to the Committee that there was a forecast budgetary pressure of £676,000 in relation to Concessionary fares, due to an increased bus patronage. However, it was noted that the increased patronage was beneficial for Blackpool Transport Services Limited.

It was also reported that there was a possibility that the £856,000 Waste Management PFI grant could be withdrawn, following the decision to terminate the contract with the private sector firm for the operation of waste recycling facilities and instead transfer operations to a company owned by Blackpool Council and Lancashire County Council. It was noted that the issue was currently subject to judicial challenge. Upon questioning from Members, Mr Thompson explained that the date for the review would be established as part of the judicial challenge process. He also explained that it had been necessary to terminate the contract with the private sector firm as it had not been delivering upon the terms of the contract.

Mr Thompson noted that there was a current overspend of approximately £3.5 million, although that figure should be considered in the context of the overall gross budget of approximately £500 million. Members raised concerns regarding the reduction in working balances and questioned its implications. Mr Thompson advised that the reduction in forecast working balances was a concern but explained that there were eight months left in the financial year to redress the position, or if the position was not redressed, there would be an option to utilise a proportion of the £45 million of Earmarked Revenue Reserves.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

Background papers: None

7 PARKING SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORT

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The Committee considered the report on performance data of Council owned car parks, both with regards to patronage and income.

In response to questions from the Committee, Councillor Mrs Wright reported that income targets for car parks were set several years ago and since that time there had been a number of changes to Council owned car parks, which had resulted in fewer parking bays being available. However, it was reported that Parking Services did consistently generate income, even though income targets had not been met.

Members raised concerns that consistently missing the income target would have an impact upon staff morale and lower motivation. However, Mr Cavill, Director of Place, advised that the level of income had risen in recent years and patronage at a number of car parks remained high. It was also noted that should the target be reduced, there would be an impact upon the Council's budget setting.

Members noted that of the Council owned car parking spaces, there was provision for four motorhomes. Members queried where those spaces were located and Mr Pertica, Head of Visitor Services advised that they were located on Lytham Road car park and that provisions for motorhome parking in the north of the town would be explored.

The Committee expressed its gratitude for details included within the performance data and questioned whether the performance in terms of income generation could be improved with a pricing review. Councillor Mrs Wright advised that a reduction in car parking prices would not necessarily result in an increase of patronage. Upon questioning, it was also noted that due to the nature of demand in Blackpool, there would inevitably be periods when the car parks were less well occupied.

Members raised questions regarding the low level of usage of the car park at the former Devonshire Road Hospital site and what lessons had been learned from that. It was noted that the site had not initially been leased to use as a car park, but rather to accommodate the contractor's equipment for use in the creation of the Talbot Gateway project. Following completion of that project it had been proposed to use the site as one of the car parks available for the staff parking scheme.

However, Mr Cavill advised that a key lesson had been learned, in that the location of the car park was vital. He noted that of the staff that had moved to Number One, Bickerstaffe Square, more had been prepared to pay a greater amount for parking permits than had been anticipated, which had enabled them to use Talbot Road Multi-Storey. Mr Cavill advised that as a result, Parking Services had not lost income as a result of low level usage at Devonshire Road, as the staff that had been expected to use the site were instead paying a greater amount to use an alternative car park, resulting in additional income being raised for the Staff Parking scheme.

The Committee noted that Parking Services was looking to relinquish the lease for Devonshire Road car park. Upon questioning, Mr Cavill advised that the worst case scenario was that there would be a requirement to serve 12 months' notice and pay the lease as due for that period. However, Parking Services would seek to negotiate with the NHS to identify a preferable solution.

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Members also asked, with regards to potential future enforcement activity in relation to Public Space Protection Orders, whether there would be an impact on the ability of officers to properly enforce parking regulations. The Committee was advised that there may be some instances when civil enforcement officers had the ability to support the enforcement associated with the new Public Space Protection Orders, but those opportunities would most likely be limited. However, Mr Pertica advised that there were a number of other officers able to undertake the enforcement associated with the new Public Space Protection Orders. There would therefore be no significant impact on the ability to provide appropriate enforcement within Council owned car parks.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

Background papers: None

8 TRANSIENCE PROGRAMME

Mr Foot, Head of Housing, presented a report updating the Committee on the progress of the Transience programme and the future direction of planned work. He provided Members with a summary of the background context of the programme, noting that it was an alternative person-centred programme that supported and referred vulnerable tenants into services that promoted healthy, sustainable lifestyles. It was explained that the programme was achieved through a dedicated team within the Families in Need division of Children's Services making contact with vulnerable tenants through the Selective Licensing inspections of private rented properties.

Mr Foot reported that the programme had started in the South Beach area of Blackpool in 2012/2013 and had since been rolled out into Claremont ward. He advised that initially the programme had been funded by Public Health but the budget was now funded for the next three years through the Transformation Challenge Award.

Upon questioning from the Committee, Mr Foot advised the Committee of the priorities for the programme over the next six months and identified the objective to move the programme into new areas of central Blackpool from 2016.

The Committee noted its support of the programme and questioned the steps being taken to ensure its continuation after the three year Transformation Challenge Award funding period. Mr Foot advised that when the bid had been made for the Transformation Challenge Award funding, the Government had been very receptive to the financial implications relating to the programme. Specifically, Mr Foot explained that the focus of the programme was on undertaking preventive work that would result in less pressure on responsive, high-level services and should therefore prove less costly on public finances in the long-run. Mr Foot added that, as part of the programme, a cost-benefit analysis would be undertaken that would also include the reductions on public spending in Police and Health Services as a result of the programme, in order to demonstrate what had been achieved.

The Committee agreed to note the content of the report.

Background papers: None.

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9 ANNUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT 2014/2015

Ms Mckeogh, Deputy Chief Executive and Mr Hall, Health and Safety Manager presented the Annual Health and Safety Report, which detailed how the Council performed in the period April 2014 – March 2015 in relation to Health and Safety matters.

Mr Hall outlined that the report summarised the areas for concern, future challenges, the changes in health and safety legislation and details of the audit reviews that had taken place in relation to health and safety.

Members raised a number of questions with a particular focus on the use of volunteers in relation to compliance with health and safety regulations. Mr Hall reported that the Health and Safety team did not directly undertake risk assessments with those volunteers, but instead worked with various responsible officers within those services using volunteers.

In response to further Member questioning, Mr Hall advised the Committee that the Health and Safety team only conducted Health and Safety Assessments for academies that had a Service Level Agreement with the Council for them to be undertaken.

The Committee agreed to note the content of the report.

Background papers: None.

10 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

Mr Kelly presented the Tourism, Resources and Economy Scrutiny Committee Workplan for the remainder of the Municipal Year. It was noted that this was a flexible, working document. Members could submit items for consideration by the Committee at any time through the Chairman.

Mr Kelly advised that a Monitoring Committee Recommendations table had been included, which would also be presented to future Committee meetings. It was explained that it would enable Members to monitor how their recommendations had been implemented.

The Chairman drew Members' attention to the Scrutiny Selection Checklist and requested that Members consider identifying topics for review. Members were informed that the Scrutiny Selection Checklist must be completed and submitted to a Committee meeting for consideration.

The Committee agreed to approve the Workplan and note the Monitoring Committee Recommendations table.

Background papers: None.

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

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The Committee agreed to note the date of the next meeting as Thursday, 19 November 2015, at 6.00 p.m.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.35 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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