

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2015**

Present:

Councillor Hunter (in the Chair)

Councillors

Mrs Callow JP

G Coleman

Roberts

Matthews

D Coleman

Galley

L Williams

Ryan

In Attendance:

Councillor Simon Blackburn

Councillor Gillian Campbell

Councillor Mark Smith

Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

Alan Cavill, Director of Place

Philip Welsh, Blackpool Council

Councillor Fred Jackson

Paolo Pertica, Head of Visitors Services

Chris Kelly, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser (Scrutiny)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor G Coleman declared a personal interest with regard to item 5, 'Forward Plan', the nature of the interest being that he was a Private Hire Licence holder.

Councillor Hunter declared a personal interest with regard to item 7 'Treasury Management Half-Yearly Progress Report to 30 September 2015', the nature of the nature of the interest being that he was a Board Member of Blackpool Housing Company.

Councillor Galley declared a personal interest with regard to item 7 'Treasury Management Half-Yearly Progress Report to 30 September 2015', the nature of the interest being that he was a Board Member of Blackpool Transport Services'.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 15 OCTOBER 2015

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the Tourism, Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15 October 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 PH57/2015, 'New Lease Unit 2- 5 Talbot Road Multi-Storey Car Park', Members questioned when the new gym would be opened. Councillor Jackson reported that it was hoped it would be opened in Spring 2016. In response to further questions, he advised that the opening date for Mr Basrai's World Cuisines restaurant was not known, but it was expected that it would be before Christmas.

The Committee raised questions relating to the impact of parking provision in Talbot multi-storey upon the opening of the gym, with specific reference to the impact upon car parking income targets by allocating parking spaces for the gym. Mr Pertica, Head of Visitors Services, advised that the busiest times of use for the gym were likely to be outside the normal 9.00am – 5.00pm working hours, therefore there should be no adverse impact upon the income of the car parks concerned.

The Committee also raised questions in relation to decision number EX/41/2015 'Council Plan 2015-2020'. In response, the Leader of the Council advised that staff had been involved in the drafting of the Council Plan and that work had been undertaken with each department to assess the impact of the new Council Plan for that area. He advised that key performance indicators for each area would be developed to assess each department's performance in implementing the priorities identified within the Council Plan.

5 FORWARD PLAN

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

Members raised questions regarding decision reference 16/2015 'Public Space Protection Orders for Parks.' In response, Councillor Campbell advised that she hoped all measures proposed in the order would have an impact on reducing anti-social behaviour. The Committee considered that all measures would need to be appropriately enforced.

The Committee also raised questions in relation to decision reference 21/2015 'Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy'. The Leader of the Council advised that the Licensing department would continue to limit the number of licences available.

A question was raised in relation to decision reference 25/2015 'Social Housing Lettings', with it being noted that a number of complaints had been received relating to the properties due to be demolished on All Hallows Road. The Deputy Leader of the Council advised the Committee that she would ensure that the properties were appropriately secured until they were demolished.

Members raised further questions regarding decision reference 26/2015 'Review of Business Rates and Council Tax Discounts and Premiums'. The Leader of the Council reported that, as part of the review, the Resources department was considering the long-

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term impact and planning for post-2020, with it being expected that local authorities would retain a significant proportion of the business rates they collected.

6 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE MONITORING AS AT MONTH 5 2015/2016

Mr Thompson, Director of Resources, presented the Financial Performance Monitoring Report as at month 5. The Committee was advised that the report was the standard monthly financial performance monitoring report, which set out the summary revenue budget position for the Council and its individual directorates for month 5, the period April 2015 – August 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 Council's latest capital programme, incorporated the Council's 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 a similar rate of collection as it had been at the same time last year and the Business Rate collection rate had improved compared to the same point in 2014/2015.

Responding to questions from Members, the Leader of the Council noted that many people were unaware of most of the services provided by the Council until such times as they were required. With particular regards to the overspend in Children's Services, he noted that Blackpool had the highest number of looked after children in the country and that Children's Services should be open to explaining the associated cost implications. He further advised that Children's Services would continue to consider the cost implications of establishing an in-house provision to provide specialist, secure care to looked after children. It was also noted that schools converting in-year to academies had had a significant impact upon the Children's Services budget.

Members raised questions relating to Community and Environmental Services and it was noted that Waste services would likely be ceasing its green waste collection. The Leader of the Council reported that negotiations would continue with the contractor and the potential for the contractor to run a paid for service would be investigated.

The Committee noted the reduction in overspend from the Resources directorate since the last month's financial performance monitoring report and questioned how that had been achieved. Mr Thompson advised that it had been mostly achieved as part of the department's programme of property rationalisation.

Members raised questions relating to the forecasted pressures from rental income within the Central Business District. The Leader of the Council advised that new tenancies were expected to be announced soon and that there were only a small number of units still available to let. The Committee was advised that negotiations with potential occupants were on-going and that the plan would be to attract appropriate tenants, which would help to increase footfall in the area.

It was noted that there was a current overspend of over £3 million and 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

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explained that there was still time left in the financial year to redress the position. He noted that working balances had been approximately £6 million for the previous two years and advised that it was still hoped that achieving a working balance for that amount could be achieved again relatively soon. The Leader of the Council also advised the Committee that any failures to achieve savings targets for this financial year would be taken into account in the budget setting process for the next financial year. He explained that some of the savings targets had not proved to be deliverable, so a reassessment had been required in certain areas, which was a major factor in the reduction of working balances in the 2015/2016 financial year.

Background papers: None

7 TREASURY MANAGEMENT HALF-YEARLY PROGRESS REPORT TO THE 30 SEPTEMBER 2015

The Committee was presented with the Treasury Management Half-Yearly Progress Report as at 30 September 2015. Mr Thompson summarised that the report provided an update on treasury management activities.

Mr Thompson presented a summary of the Council's borrowing activities for the first half of the financial year and advised that the Bank of England Official Bank Rate had remained low throughout the financial year. He explained that the result had been that the cost of short term borrowing had continued to be at historically low levels. He also advised that the low base rate had helped to ease the pressures of pay and pension liabilities for local authorities.

The Committee was also advised that temporary borrowing had been a major factor in the treasury management strategy during the year, with it being used to deal with the normal peaks and troughs of cash flow, as well as financing any shortfalls in cash flow caused by capital expenditure.

The Committee noted the service provided advice to the Council companies and questioned whether those companies could gain access to the Public Works Loans Board through the Council. Mr Thompson advised that those companies would be able to access borrowing in that way, but that the main focus of treasury management work with the Council owned companies would be in relation to shared policies about holding excess cash and the related security of that cash.

Background papers: None

8 TOURISM PERFORMANCE REPORT

Mr Welsh, Head of Visitor Economy, presented a report on tourism performance between April 2015 and the end of the October 2015.

The Committee noted that the overall trend for the season had shown a relatively slow start to the year, but had gradually built by August and then reached what appeared to be record-breaking figures during October half-term. Members considered the performance to be impressive.

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Members questioned the plans of the service to expand its market to a more global audience. Mr Welsh advised that the service continued to work with Visit England and that work would be done to engage with new audiences, which had been opened up to the resort as a result of new direct flights from mainland China into Manchester Airport being introduced from next June. The Committee also discussed the appeal of the resort's Ballroom dance product to the Chinese market, which had proven to be increasingly popular over recent years.

Mr Welsh, in response to questions from the Committee, advised that unfortunately the service was not able to assess any meaningful data that linked public visits to the Visit Blackpool website, with hotel bookings. He noted that many people saw the hotel they wished to book through the website but then booked that accommodation on specialist hotel booking sites. He reported that incorporating a purpose-built accommodation booking facility through the Visit Blackpool website was an issue that needed to be addressed.

Committee Members also questioned the reasons for the slight reduction in the purchase of Resort passes and Mr Welsh advised that it had not been marketed at quite the same level that it had been upon its launch. He added that it was planned that for next year from January 2016, it would offer better value, with restaurants included into the offer.

Background papers: None.

9 EMPLOYMENT AND SELF EMPLOYMENT SERVICES (FOR ADULTS AGED 18+)

Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Business and Economic Development introduced a report to the Committee on the range of services delivered by the Council to assist unemployed residents to access local job opportunities or become self-employed.

Mr Legg, Head of Economic Development reported to the Committee the activities of Positive Steps into Work, which was a team of employment specialists operating a series of contracts and projects around employment support. He explained that Positive Steps had been established in 2007 to pilot ways of assisting inactive incapacity benefit claimants into work and with external funding, had now expanded its remit and to become an outreach team operating in the most deprived neighbourhoods. Loss of grants and external funding had forced the team to seek commercial sub-contract opportunities under the government's Work Programme from 2011, which focused on assisting longer term unemployed into local jobs. It was noted that funding for the programme was earned in arrears based on attachment payments, job outcomes and in-work sustainability. Other project opportunities had arisen in the last few years including closer collaboration with the Council's Public Health department.

Members were advised that the Service was not delivered with Council core funding and that instead, it relied upon commercial contracts and external funding awarded to the Council.

The Committee was also advised of future projects and opportunities that the service aimed to provide, including the 'Mental Health and Employment Trailblazer.' Mr Legg

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explained the project, which was one of four national pilots, aimed to test an integrated model of employment and clinical health support for up to 1,000 jobseekers in the borough. He advised that the primary aim of the model was to improve job outcomes for one of the hardest to help cohorts in the labour market. Members were advised that the £2.1m project would be part funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government's Transformation Challenge Award fund and the European Social Fund, for which a bidding process for funding was currently being finalised. It was hoped the pilot could commence from April 2016 and would run for two years.

Mr Slater, Business Growth Manager, informed the Committee of the Get Started programme offering accredited business advice, training and events for new start businesses, which formed part of the wider Business Support Team. The focus of the programme was on assisting pre and post business startups and businesses in the first three years of trading. The Committee was advised that the programme had helped almost 1,000 new businesses to start trading since 2007.

The Committee was provided with details of the planned future direction of the service, which aimed to do more to improve the confidence and creativity of young businesses to encourage growth. It was also noted that the service was entirely dependent on Council core funding at present. However, it was reported that external funding opportunities were being explored.

In response to Committee questions, it was stated that many startups were created by local people who had a desire to become self-employed, but that there were also several examples of businesses that Get Started had helped that had experienced growth and were now employing a number of local people. Councillor Smith also explained that those startup businesses had been in a diverse range of industries.

Background papers: None.

10 COUNTER TERRORISM REPORT

Mr Pertica, Head of Visitors Services, presented a report that provided an update on the activity undertaken by the Council and its partners in relation to the statutory duties introduced by the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 Act, with particular reference to the 'Prevent' strand of the CONTEST strategy.

The Committee was advised that CONTEST was the UK's Counter Terrorism Strategy and it contained four main strands, which were:

- Pursue: investigation and disruption of terrorist attacks;
- Prevent: working to prevent people becoming radicalised and subsequently engaging in, or supporting, terrorism and extremism;
- Protect: improving protective security to prevent a terrorist attack, for example on Critical Infrastructure and Crowded Places; and
- Prepare: working to minimise the impact of an attack and to recover from it as quickly as possible.

Mr Pertica discussed the Prevent strand in more detail, explaining that it was coordinated

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by the pan-Lancashire Prevent Delivery Managers Group, which reported to the Lancashire Chief Executive Group. Blackpool Council Corporate Leadership Team had established a Task and Finish Group to ensure the Council's responsibilities under the new legislation were fulfilled.

The Committee was advised of the new statutory duties imposed upon local authorities, which included a duty to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. Mr Pertica detailed a number of tasks that must be undertaken by local authorities and noted that the implementation of statutory requirements would be inspected by the Home Office.

Members raised a number of concerns relating to terrorism and it was considered important not to let the actions of a small minority prevent people from acting as they would normally do. Members noted that there was also a threat from extreme right-wing terrorism in Blackpool, the views of which were advanced following recent global incidents as had been witnessed in Paris.

Background papers: None.

11 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 the Monitoring Committee Recommendations table had been included that enabled 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.

12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

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

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Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.50 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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