

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 21 JANUARY 2016**

Present:

Councillor Hunter (in the Chair)

Councillors

Mrs Callow JP
G Coleman

Galley
Roberts

Rowson
Ryan

L Williams

In Attendance:

Councillor Peter Callow

Councillor Gillian Campbell

Alan Cavill, Director of Place

Ruth Henshaw, Engagement and Intelligence Officer

Councillor Fred Jackson

Chris Kelly, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser (Scrutiny)

Paolo Pertica, Head of Visitors Services

Councillor Vikki Singleton

Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

Apologies:

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

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor G Coleman declared a personal interest with regard to item 5, 'Forward Plan' and item 7 'Financial Performance Monitoring As at Month 8 2015/2016', the nature of the interest being that he was a Private Hire Licence holder.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 19 NOVEMBER 2016

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the Tourism, Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 19 November 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

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.

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With regards to decision number PH61/2015, 'Disposal of Historic Newspapers in Coastal House Basement', Members queried whether volunteers could be used to help sort and remove the collection of historic newspapers in the Coastal House basement. In response Councillor Campbell, Deputy Leader of the Council, advised that there was a Collections Manager, whom interested volunteers could contact. She also advised that the Blackpool Gazette had alternative copies of the newspapers.

The Committee also raised questions in relation to decision number PH67/2015 'Bridge Maintenance Works' and whether the maintenance planned could be coordinated with Network Rail's plans to electrify the rail line. Mr Cavill, Director of Place advised that there were a number of issues to be considered regarding any potential coordination of work. He explained that whilst it may be preferable to minimise disruption through both planned maintenance works being undertaken at the same time, a potential drawback could be in the disruption to routes into Blackpool for tourists occurring at the same time. Mr Cavill also informed Members that to date, Network Rail had not been able to comment upon when it would commence the electrification work.

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

5 FORWARD PLAN

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

Members raised questions and requested further details regarding decision reference 1/2016 'Acquisition of Property on Talbot Road.' In response, Councillor Jackson advised that the property was currently occupied by Wilkinson's. He added that there were proposals for Wilkinson's to move to a premises on Tower Street, as the existing location of the business was within the next phase of the Talbot Gateway Development.

The Committee also raised questions in relation to decision reference 31/2015 'To consider and approve adoption of the Council's Treasury Management and Investment Strategies for the financial year 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017'. Mr Thompson, Director of Resources, advised that the Treasury Management Strategy was currently being drafted and would be considered by the Executive in February. He added that he expected to remain low and that borrowing would be predicated on that basis. Mr Thompson also explained, upon further questioning from Members, that the Council had very few Lender Option Borrower Option loans, but that the termination date of those loans was set as part of the terms of the particular loan. He noted the first loan of that type would be fully repaid soon.

The Committee agreed to note the Forward Plan items.

6 COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT Q2 2015/2016

Mrs Henshaw, Corporate Development Officer, presented a performance report to the Committee relating to the Leader's portfolio (Organisational Resilience) and the Deputy

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Leader's portfolio (Priority 1 - Tourism, Economic Growth and Jobs). The report captured data up to Quarter Two (September 2015) of the 2015/16 cycle. The report also tracked performance where possible back to 2013/14 to allow Members to monitor performance over time.

Mrs Henshaw reported that performance at Quarter Two showed that two indicators demonstrated improved performance for Organisational Resilience and six indicators showed improved performance for Priority One. Members' attention was drawn to the Exception sheets that detailed the performance of those indicators showing cause for concern within the current year.

The Committee raised questions regarding the indicator 'Percentage of transactions / contacts dealt with at the first point of contact in Customer First'. Mrs Henshaw advised that the figures for the indicator included face to face contacts only. Members considered that it would be useful to be provided with the performance of the indicator in relation to telephone contacts.

Members queried details relating to the residents survey and Mrs Henshaw advised that the survey, which was created by the Research and Intelligence team and used a standard methodology, aimed to establish the general satisfaction in Council services amongst residents. The Committee discussed the potential methods for surveying residents' opinion, with Members expressing concerns regarding the potential for anxiety to be raised amongst some residents fearing possible telephone scams. Councillor Campbell noted that she understood the concerns but reassured the Committee that when residents were contacted, they were asked whether they were happy to be contacted by telephone and that no personal details or financial information was requested.

The methodology for the Visitor Satisfaction Survey was also discussed by the Committee and Mr Cavill advised that the survey was only conducted face to face with visitors in the resort at exit points to various attractions, such as Blackpool Tower and the Winter Gardens.

Upon further questioning from Members, Mrs Henshaw advised that there was no consistent approach to setting targets, which were mainly done at service level. It was considered that targets should be reviewed by the Committee in preparation for the 2016/17 calendar year. Mrs Henshaw also advised that benchmarking data against other local authorities was not available for all indicators but the Committee could consider requesting that benchmarking data was included in future reporting where possible.

The Committee agreed to establish a Scrutiny Panel to review target setting for 2016/2017 and to consider the content of future performance reports.

Background papers: None

7 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE MONITORING AS AT MONTH 8 2015/2016

Mr Thompson, Director of Resources, presented the Financial Performance Monitoring Report as at month 8. The Committee was advised that the report set out the summary revenue budget position for the Council and its individual directorates for month 8, the

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period April 2015 – November 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, it indicated the level of cash flow and contained information relating to income and debt collection.

Mr Thompson advised that there had been a deterioration in the overall financial position compared to month 5, when the Committee had last considered financial performance reports. However, he explained that the deterioration disguised a myriad of budgetary movements, with many directorates demonstrating an improved performance. Mr Thompson also reported that the figures for Month 9 did show some improvements and he considered that the position regarding the working balances should be much improved by the end of the financial year.

The Committee was advised 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. It was reported that whilst the number of placements had stabilised between 440 and 460 for over 12 months, the increasing overspend was due to an increase in the cost of placements for children with complex needs.

Members were advised that an overspend of £300k on capital schemes was anticipated as a result of the additional holding time of the Syndicate building and the delays in demolition due to unforeseen obstacles.

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 lower than it had been last year, but that the Business Rates collection rate had improved compared to the same point in 2014/2015. The Committee considered that it would be critical to ensure high Business Rates collection rates in light of potential future plans for local authorities to retain business rates in full.

Responding to questions from Members, Mr Thompson explained the implications in the event of the forecast position becoming the actual outturn, which would currently contravene the Financial Procedure Rules set out in the Constitution. He explained to Members that the very last resort would be for him to issue a s114 Notice to Full Council in order to suspend all contracts. He explained however, that the budgetary position would have to deteriorate substantially before that course of action was considered and reassured Members that the distance from contravening the Financial Procedure Rules was marginal at £220k and that, in the context of £40.6m of Earmarked Revenue Reserves and with four months of the financial year remaining, there should still be sufficient time to redress the position.

Members raised questions relating to the earmarked reserves, noting they had decreased since the Month 5 position. Mr Thompson advised that the reduction had been due to pension strains and redundancy costs. He advised that the earmarked reserves were being used for their intended purpose, to cushion the impact of costs over the medium term.

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Upon questioning from Members relating to the offer of a long term, four year funding settlement from Government, Mr Thompson advised that he would consider a financially certain position preferable to the financially uncertain position that would be created in the event of not accepting the long term settlement.

The Committee also discussed a potential rise in Council Tax that was now being encouraged by the Government. Mr Thompson advised that a Council Tax increase alone would not provide such significant increase in revenue in order to substantially alleviate budgetary pressures. Members commented that should there be a Council Tax increase, there would be a strong requirement to demonstrate the services that were provided and how taxpayers' money was being used.

Members raised questions relating to the £856k Private Finance Initiative Grant no longer being available and potentially being subject to Judicial Review with the risk being covered against the specific Waste PFI reserve. Mr Thompson explained that the advice was now to not go to Judicial Review and to revise plans with Lancashire County Council over the delivery of the service. Members were also reminded 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.

Members also noted that the report indicated a budgetary pressure of £96k in Leisure Services due to the early closure of the Gateway Gym. Mr Thompson advised that the cost of the closure to the gym could be considered as being more of an investment, as it had enabled the public sector to demonstrate to the private sector that a town centre gym was viable. He advised that the private sector had made a better offer than what the Gateway gym had been able to achieve and there would now be provision for a gym opening 24 hours a day that would help to increase footfall in the area.

Members also raised questions in relation to Concessionary Fares forecasting a pressure of £663k due to increased bus patronage, whilst considering that it was positive that public transport was being used. Mr Thompson advised that Blackpool had the highest take-up of concessionary fare Now cards across Lancashire and Cumbria. He noted that a number of local authorities were lobbying the Government in order to relax some of the requirements for concessionary fares that impacted heavily on local authority budgets.

Members questioned what the cumulative impact of budget cuts had been to Blackpool since 2011/2012. Mr Thompson advised that he did not currently have the figure available, but that it could be calculated and the Committee could subsequently be informed.

The Committee agreed to receive information on the calculated cumulative impact of budget cuts to Blackpool since 2011/2012 to be distributed amongst Members outside of the meeting.

Background papers: None

8 COMMUNITY SAFETY PERFORMANCE REPORT APRIL TO NOVEMBER 2015

Mr Pertica, Head of Visitor Services, presented a report that detailed performance within

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the Community Safety Partnership's priorities between April 2015 and November 2016. The report also set out the new Partnership priorities for the 2016/2019 period.

The Committee questioned how the Partnership provided direction to the various agencies that were able to take action, once the Partnership's priorities had been identified. Mr Pertica advised that most agencies with the ability to deal with priority issues were represented on the Partnership, such as the local authority and the Police, and they were able to arrange their resources accordingly to deal with the priorities identified by the Partnership.

Members raised a number of questions regarding anti-social behaviour by young people, noting the prolific cohort of young people targeting parks, the Town Centre and the Promenade as mentioned in the report. Mr Pertica advised that the Partnership always looked to support preventative measures in order to prevent crimes and noted the support the Partnership had provided for Blackpool Kicks and the work undertaken with Youth Services to help direct young people into constructive activities. However, he advised the particular cohort demonstrated extreme anti-social behaviour and Councillor Campbell added that she believed all of the involved young people and their parents had since been issued with a Community Protection Order.

Upon questioning from Members, Mr Pertica advised of the various rehabilitation services provided and supported by the Partnership, noting that the Lancashire and Cumbria Community Rehabilitation Company, which had previously been part of the Probation Service, was a Partnership Member. Mr Pertica also informed the Committee of the work undertaken by Jobs, Friends and Houses, which was a social enterprise helping ex-offenders into work and housing.

The Committee questioned whether any organisation involved with the Partnership did not contribute appropriately. Mr Pertica advised that there was a strong tradition of partnership working in Blackpool and over recent years there had been less funding and resources available, which had strengthened the requirement for the various agencies to cooperate. He provided an example of the Lost Children's Centre on the Promenade and how its effectiveness could be demonstrated by the Partnership.

The Committee noted the schemes that had been introduced by the Partnership to try to reduce assaults, such as the Night Safe Haven Bus and the 'Alcohol Changes You' beer mat campaign. Members noted that feedback on the schemes had been positive, but questioned whether their success could be demonstrated in light of the increase in the number of assaults. Mr Pertica advised that whilst the overall number of assaults had increased, serious assaults had reduced by 26.4% and that there had been changes to how crimes had been recorded, which had resulted in crime statistics demonstrating an increase. Mr Pertica noted that this had been a national trend. Mr Pertica also discussed the beer mat campaign and explained that licence holders had not initially been enthusiastic about the scheme, but had since become in favour of it as, anecdotally, there had been an improvement in behaviour in their licensed premises.

The Committee requested that the next report provided information on disability hate crime and the measures being taken by the Partnership to tackle it.

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The Committee also discussed and raised questions in relation to sexual offences, of which there had been an increasing number over the last three years. In response, Mr Pertica advised that the increase in crimes of this nature was a national trend and it was largely thought to be attributed to a greater willingness in victims to come forward and report crimes. He explained that the 'Jimmy Saville' effect had resulted in a vast number of 'non-recent' crimes being reported. He also noted that there had been improvements in the recording of rapes and sexual offences.

Mr Pertica advised that the Partnership continued to support the Aquamarine working group which worked with partners to tackle sexual offences by looking at educational opportunities and awareness raising. The Committee was advised that a substantial percentage of the reported crimes of this nature were being committed by young people and that those offenders often did not know their activity was illegal. He reported that the Aquamarine working group was currently considering implementing the 'We Can Stop It' campaign, which aimed to raise awareness and provide information for young men about consent and perceptions of rape.

The Committee agreed to request that information on disability hate crime and the measures being taken by the Partnership to tackle it, be included within the next Community Safety Partnership report.

Background papers: None.

9 LICENSED HORSE DRAWN HACKNEY CARRIAGES SCRUTINY REVIEW FINAL REPORT

Councillor Hunter, Chairman for the Licensed Horse Drawn Hackney Carriages Scrutiny Review presented the final report of the Panel to the Committee.

The Committee agreed to approve and forward the final report to the Executive.

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.

Councillor Galley, as Chairman of the Audit Committee, reported to the Committee that through the work of the Audit Committee, potential items for the Tourism, Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee's consideration had been identified. He advised that the Audit Committee recommended the Tourism, Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the Highways Asset Management Strategy and a report on the impact of Channel Shift and the performance of Customer Services.

The Committee noted that the Monitoring Committee Recommendations table had been included that enabled Members to monitor how their recommendations had been implemented.

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The Committee agreed:

- 1) To approve the Workplan
- 2) To approve the recommended items for consideration from the Audit Committee and for those items to be incorporated into the Workplan.
- 3) To note the Monitoring Committee Recommendations table.

Background papers: None.

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee agreed to note the date of the next meeting as Thursday, 31 March 2016, at 6.00 p.m.

The Committee also noted the date and time of the Budget Consultation meeting with Non-Domestic Ratepayers and Trade Union Representatives as Friday, 12 February 2016, commencing at 9.30 a.m.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.30 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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