

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 14 APRIL 2021**

**Present:**

Councillor Mitchell (in the Chair)

Councillors

Burdess	Galley	Jackson	Wilshaw
G Coleman	Hugo	Walsh	

**In Attendance:**

Councillor Neal Brookes, Cabinet Member of Housing and Welfare Reform  
Councillor Gillian Campbell, Cabinet Member for Culture and Tourism  
Councillor Jim Hobson, Cabinet Member of Climate Change and Environment  
Councillor Maria Kirkland, Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion and Leisure  
Councillor Mark Smith, Business, Enterprise and Job Creation

Councillor Mrs Maxine Callow JP, Chair of the Scrutiny Leadership Board

Steve Thompson, Director of Resources  
Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration

Nick Gerrard, Growth and Prosperity Programme Director  
Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications  
Lisa Arnold, Head of Leisure, Parks and Catering Services  
Annie Heslop, Green Infrastructure Development Manager  
Ian Large, Performance Manager, Traffic and Highways Management

John Greenbank, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser (Scrutiny)

**1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made on this occasion.

**2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 3 FEBRUARY 2021**

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2021 be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

**3 PUBLIC SPEAKING**

There were no public speakers 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 3 February 2021.

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The Committee queried EX18/2021, noting the £90k that had been agreed in prudential borrowing for tramway works and asked how the money would be used. Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration, replied that the money had been agreed to cover a five-year period of maintenance works to the tramway along the promenade. He stated that agreeing the level of prudential borrowing in this manner would allow borrowing within the next five years without the need for individual decisions whenever tramway works were required. It was added that this would support the development of a tramway maintenance plan.

## **5 FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the contents of the Council's Forward Plan April 2021 to August 2021, relating to the portfolios of the Cabinet Members whose responsibilities fell within its remit.

Members asked if the number of Business Loan applications could be provided since the last meeting. Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources, responded that the item appeared on the Forward Plan in order to facilitate a response to any applications that were received. Since the last meeting in February 2021, Mr Thompson stated that no applications had been received or loans agreed, he added that it was not expected that any would be received until after May 2021. It was also stated that details of approved loan applications were published on the Council website.

Regarding the Tree Strategy, scheduled for consideration in April 2021, members asked if an update could be provided on its development. Ms Annie Heslop, Green Infrastructure Development Manager, informed the Committee that the Council was on track to meet its tree planting target and that at the time of the meeting the strategy was undergoing public consultation. It was added that a report on the related Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy would also be considered by the upcoming meeting of the Scrutiny Leadership Board, and that this could be circulated for information.

## **6 TOURISM PERFORMANCE AND RECOVERY UPDATE**

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications, presented the Tourism Performance and Recovery Update.

The update outlined the actions being undertaken to recover from the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions and showed that tourism recovery planning was at an advanced stage and provided a long-term plan for supporting tourist businesses in Blackpool.

Mr Welsh also reported that a Tourism BID had been developed in partnership with the private sector in Blackpool. This BID would sit alongside the Town Centre BID already in place and if successful could generate up to £1m a year to support tourism in Blackpool.

The Committee expressed concern that with the easing of lockdown restrictions some businesses could raise prices to a level that would discourage visitors and could reduce visits. It was therefore asked if anything could be done by the Council to discourage

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increased pricing. Mr Welsh replied that the issue had been recognised and that any increase would be driven by high demand and a lack of competition due to restrictions on foreign holiday travel. However, it was expected that as lockdown eased these demand pressures would reduce, allowing prices to “level-off”.

Members of the Committee noted that there had been an issue of increased littering as lockdown ended and visitors returned to Blackpool. It was queried therefore if the Covid Marshals, employed to ensure Covid-19 restrictions were enforced, could be utilised to discourage littering in Blackpool. Councillor Gillian Campbell, Cabinet Member for Culture and Tourism, replied that they welcomed the idea of using the Marshals in this way and that they would investigate if this would be possible. She also added that work would be undertaken to involve food stall owners to encourage their customers to use bins. Mr Welsh added that public service messaging was being developed to support this work, that an audio system attached to the CCTV network and partnership working with local private sector attractions would also be used to encourage the use of bins.

**7 ARTS AND CULTURE - IMPACT OF COVID-19**

Mr Peter Legg, Head of Economic and Cultural Services and Ms Carolyn Primett, Head of Arts, presented a report outlining the impact the Covid-19 lockdown on arts and culture within Blackpool.

Mr Legg highlighted that many creative industries within Blackpool had struggled during the lockdown period when they had been forced to close. As part of the work being undertaken to assess the extent of the impact the Council had undertaken a survey of members of the Heritage Action Zone (HAZ). Although the report had outlined some initial feedback from this survey Mr Legg informed members that a more detailed analysis was required the outcome of which could be presented to the Committee in the autumn.

Ms Primett added that the lockdown had impacted differently on the various cultural venues across Blackpool. Many of these were reported as preparing to reopen as the lockdown restrictions were lifted, and the Council would seek to support them through this period. It was also highlighted that the Grundy Art Gallery had been able to open due to the small number of staff who worked there. As part of this Ms Primett informed the Committee that during May 2021 it was planned that an exhibition of works of art done during lockdown would be shown. It was hoped that this would help promote the various artists involved and highlight Blackpool as a cultural venue.

Members asked if more could be undertaken to join-up the various cultural and artistic venues in Blackpool, possibly through the creation of a cultural hub within the town. Ms Primett replied that work had been undertaken to bring the cultural sector in Blackpool together, through joint marketing and the sharing of resources. Increased networking to highlight opportunities was also mentioned, and Ms Primett informed members that consideration had also been given to the establishment of a ‘Cultural Partnership’ to further joint working.

The Committee noted that £73K had been awarded to the Art B&B from round two of the Government’s Cultural Recovery Fund (CRF-2). Members asked why the Art B&B had been able to apply for this money when other hotels in Blackpool had not and would have

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received far less in business support grants. Ms Primett responded that the Council had no input into CRF-2, however she noted that the rules for receiving funding would mean that any grant would be to support a cultural programme and not the core hotel business.

The work undertaken by various venues to maintain patronage and interest in cultural events in Blackpool was also reported. Ms Primett informed the Committee that the Grand theatre had streamed its Christmas Pantomime online, when it had been unable to welcome an audience to the venue. This approach had also been undertaken by a variety of smaller cultural groups to allow ongoing engagement.

The use of Blackpool's green spaces was raised as a possible solution to the restrictions on indoor performance, where numbers could be restricted. In response Ms Primett explained that the Council had recognised the opportunity that this had presented. For example it was noted that an Arts Council Grant had been received by the Lightpool festival to design new lights which would be used as part of outdoor displays. Stanley Park was also being considered as a venue for a number of smaller events.

Members also asked what had been undertaken to ensure that young people were engaged with arts and culture in Blackpool. Ms Primett responded that a number of cultural groups and venues had undertaken work, such as the Grundy which had worked with the 'A-Team' a group for young people with autism to deliver creative projects and dances classes had been organised in Stanley Park specifically aimed at young people.

Councillor Campbell added that lockdown had forced people to find new and innovative ways of delivering cultural events and engage with people. She added that she expected this would continue into the future.

The Committee thanked Mr Legg and Ms Primett for the update and agreed that a further report outlining the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown and the recovery work being undertaken be brought to a review panel meeting in September 2021 for further consideration.

## **8 TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION UPDATE**

Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Regeneration and Communication and Mr Nick Gerrard, Growth and Prosperity Programme Director, presented the Town Centre Regeneration update. The update provided details on the work being undertaken in relation to regeneration within Blackpool town centre. Mr Gerrard explained that good progress had been made during the period of lockdown. An unexpected benefit to projects had been the development of online meetings which had simplified bringing various parties together to discuss work.

The Committee asked if the Council had enough capacity to manage the various and complex projects that were being undertaken. Mr Gerrard replied that the capacity for managing contracts and projects was kept under constant review, with weekly meeting between himself and Mr Cavill, and that more resources had been made available where necessary to support project management. He added that the delivery of regeneration was a joint effort of teams across the Council who pooled their expertise and resources to help ensure projects were delivered successfully.

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The need to preserve and build new green spaces in the town centre as it was regenerated was raised as an issue. In response Mr Gerrard explained that the benefits of green spaces in the town centre had been recognised and that work was underway to ensure green space was included in plans for the Talbot Gateway stage 3 development and the Central Leisure Area. He added that the Quality Corridors programme would also improve the roads into the town centre and the environment around them.

Members of the Committee also asked if more details could be provided regarding the proposed Adelaide Street Transport Hub, referred to in the report. Mr Gerrard explained that with the ongoing regeneration of the town centre it was expected that there would be an increase in vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Mr Ian Large, Performance Manager, Traffic and Highways Management, added that the Hub would be developed to allow the management of increased traffic to the area and ensure that the different forms of traffic interacted in a way that did not disrupt the local area.

The use of the Quality Corridor fund to improve some of the areas in the town centre was also raised. Members of the Committee noted that although money had been spent on developments, there were cases where the surrounding streets remained in poor repair. Mr Gerrard replied that the Council recognised that this was an issue in many areas and that work needed to be undertaken to determine where funding could be sought. He added that potential sources of funding for this work would be the Quality Corridor or the Levelling-Up Fund. He added that any improvements undertaken would be linked to an increase in the overall condition of their local area.

The Committee also asked if an update on a replacement for the former Debenhams Department store could be provided. Mr Gerrard informed Members that no new information could be reported at the time of the meeting but a solution for the space created by the departure of Debenhams was being actively pursued.

The quality of the shopping offer available in the town centre was discussed, with Members noting that a number of stores had closed and as a result units had become vacant. In reply Mr Gerrard explained that the solution to this issue was the development of a diverse town centre offer that was not dependent on retail. This included the building of a new IMAX theatre and attracting new employers to the town centre, who could then help support existing businesses.

## **9 PARKS AND GREEN ENVIRONMENT ANNUAL REPORT**

Ms Lisa Arnold, Head of Leisure, Parks and Catering Services, and Ms Annie Heslop, Green Infrastructure Development Manager, presented the Parks and Green Environment Annual Report, which detailed the work undertaken, future plans and the performance of the Parks Development Service.

Ms Heslop informed the Committee that Covid-19 had demonstrated the importance of access to green spaces for leisure and recreation. The service had completed a number of projects during 2020/2021, including the re-opening of Anchorsholme Park which had been closed for five years, the footballing facilities at Fisher Field had also been reopened along with the Layton Recreation Ground.

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The Park Ranger Service was also reported as having to change its model of delivery during 2020/2021 due to the restriction on face-to-face contact during lockdown. In order to encourage nature based learning and to help facilitate this with parents for their children, over 10k of printed packs with activities for children to engage with nature had been distribute to schools across Blackpool. The service also organised and ran online activities to maintain and encourage engagement during the lockdown period.

Work had also been undertaken to support the delivery of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, including the development of the Tree Strategy. As part of this work over 4,000 trees had been planted in Blackpool during 2020. In addition to this Ms Heslop informed Members that officers would be creating Park Development Plans for each of the parks in Blackpool. These plans would review the existing individual offer and characteristics of a park and seek to engage the local community in determining what they wanted from their local green spaces.

The Committee queried why no budget information had been provided as part of the Annual Report. Ms Arnold responded that this information had not been supplied as the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown had meant the data was not comparable with previous years and was therefore of limited value in determining the financial position of the service.

Members also asked if details of where trees that had been planted by the Council could be provided. Ms Heslop replied that a list could be provided following the meeting. She added that initially the service had purchased smaller varieties of tree so that in the first stage more could be planted, but that a greater variety would be planted as the programme developed. It was also stated that the Council would look to plant more trees in the town centre in the future.

The type of trees being bought for planting in Blackpool was also discussed by the Committee. It was noted that in previous years diseases such as Dutch Elm and Ash Dyebark had been an issue. Ms Heslop responded that the Council had sought to purchase a wide variety of trees which would increase resilience against disease. She also stated that the location of planting would also inform the purchase of trees, for example those to be planted near to highways would be selected for their ability to absorb carbon.

The Committee agreed that a list of the locations of trees planted in Blackpool be circulated following the meeting.

## **10 PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY UPDATE REPORT**

Councillor Jim Hobson, Cabinet Member of Climate Change and Environment, and Mr Ian Large, Performance Manager presented an update report on Public Rights of Way (PROW) in Blackpool. The report outlined the current challenges faced in maintaining PROWs and ensuring access to them.

Councillor Hobson informed the Committee that the £40k highlighted in the report that would be needed to undertake all outstanding maintenance work had now been allocated to the highways service. This would allow all PROWs in Blackpool to be put into a good

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state of repair. He also added that this should be considered good news for Blackpool, as the mental and physical health benefits of being able to exercise outdoors had been recognised.

The Committee welcomed the announcement that additional funding had been allocated for the maintenance of PROWs in Blackpool, but asked if details of where the money had been allocated from could be supplied. Members also noted that it was planned that further scrutiny of PROWs in Blackpool would be undertaken as part of a dedicated review panel. As part of this they asked that issues such as signage, how PROWs were publicised and the engagement of the community and young people be considered. It was also asked if the possibility of a site visit be explored, once Covid-19 restrictions allowed.

The Chair also informed the Committee that he had received an email from Mr Ken Cridland, who had been a public speaker on the issue of PROWs at the Committee's meeting in February 2021. Mr Cridland had stated that it was his belief that the Council was not carrying out its duties in respect of PROWs and that in his view it had not taken enforcement action against landowners who had obstructed or damaged paths in the past.

Councillor Hobson responded that he welcomed additional scrutiny of PROWs in Blackpool but disputed that the Council had not carried out its duties and noted that the announced £40k would allow for many of the issues previously identified to be corrected.

The Committee agreed that;

1. The update report be noted;
2. That details of the source of the announced additional £40k in funding be provided following the meeting; and
3. That a dedicated scrutiny review panel to further consider the issue of PROWs in Blackpool, be added to the Scrutiny Workplan.

## **11 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN**

The Committee considered the Scrutiny Workplan report, an update on work undertaken by the Flood Risk Management Scrutiny Review Panel and the outcome of the Housing and Homelessness Scrutiny Review.

Members were informed that at its 22 March 2021 meeting the Executive had approved the recommendations of the Housing and Homelessness Scrutiny Review. As a result of which the Committee would receive a new annual report from the Housing Service, the first of which would be in the autumn of 2021. This report would include details of progress on the implementation of the agreed recommendations.

The Committee agreed to note the contents of the Scrutiny Workplan, including the addition of items identified at the meeting, and the outcome of the Flood Risk Management Scrutiny Review and the Housing and Homelessness Scrutiny Review.

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**12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting of the committee was confirmed as Wednesday, 16 June 2021 at 6.00pm, subject to confirmation at Annual Council.

**Chairman**

(The meeting ended at 8.00 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:  
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