

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP BOARD MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 2 MARCH 2022

Present:

Councillor Mrs Callow JP (in the Chair)

Councillors

Burdess	Hutton	Stansfield
Galley	Mrs Scott	Walsh

In Attendance:

Lisa Arnold, Head of Catering and Leisure Services
Sharon Davis, Scrutiny Manager
Ruth Henshaw, Delivery Development Officer
Annie Heslop, Green Infrastructure Development Manager
Grace Naylor, Graduate Strategy Officer
Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2021

The minutes of the last meeting held on 16 September 2021 were signed by the Chair as a true and correct record.

3 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE MONITORING AS AT MONTH 9 2021/22

Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources presented the financial performance monitoring as at month 9 2021/2022 to the Scrutiny Leadership Board. He highlighted that month 9 was a key milestone in the financial year with the data being used to inform the following year's budget and provide a year end forecast. The reporting focussed on individual services with the highest overspend being noted in Children's Services.

It was reported that the Council had maintained working balances of approximately £6 million despite the volatility caused by the pandemic and that focussed remained on building earmarked reserves to protect the Council from potential future liabilities.

The net Covid costs to the Council in 2021/2022 had been recorded as £3.7 million once the additional grants received had been taken into account. This contributed to a total overspend of £5.6 million in the current financial year. Initially savings of £20.3 million had been identified for 2021/2022, the vast majority of which had been achieved, however, additional pressures had emerged during the year resulting in the overspend.

Mr Thompson referred to levels of Council Tax and Business Rate collection, noting the business rate grants on offer from the Government during the pandemic. He also highlighted the ongoing capital investment at Foxhall Village before receiving questions.

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Members noted the Council's Medium Term Financial Sustainability (MTFS) Strategy and queried the progress being made in comparison to the expectations set out within the Strategy. In response, Mr Thompson advised that it was difficult to compare in-year financial reporting with a six- year strategy. The Council had been successful in adapting and delivering services through the pandemic whilst still regarding the principles set out within the MTFS Strategy which had been agreed prior to the pandemic.

In response to a further question, Mr Thompson advised that local government was currently a high risk sector and that the six-year MTFS provided the financial direction of the Council and demonstrated how the Council would remain solvent and sustainable.

The Board considered the main areas of overspend within the month 9 reporting and requested more information regarding the overspends on educational transport and the Conference Centre. In reply, Mr Thompson advised that the pressure on school transport had increased in recent years, however, its provision had recently been moved to a different department within the Council and the budget would be 'right sized' in order to ensure it accurately reflected the expected spend. In relation to the Conference Centre he advised that there had been delays in opening, however, due to the pandemic it would not have been able to operate as expected if it had opened on time. Mr Thompson noted that the conference industry was operating at 50% of pre-pandemic levels and therefore aggressive marketing of the Centre was required in order to attract new clients.

The Chair highlighted that Blackpool Council had received some of the highest cuts in funding per head of population and raised concerns that this was the case when Blackpool was known to be an area of significant deprivation. She queried what the Council was doing to bring this issue to the attention of the Government. In response, Mr Thompson advised that the Council was in ongoing dialogue with the new Department for Levelling Up and that advice had been received that the local government funding formula would be reviewed.

4 COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT - Q2 2021/22

Ms Ruth Henshaw, Delivery Development Officer presented the quarter 2 Council Plan performance data noting that quarter 3 data would be submitted to the Board in July 2022 alongside end of year data. She provided an overview of the key indicators within both priority 1 and priority 2 and noted that the indicators relating to organisations resilience would be updated to reflect the Council's climate emergency ambitions.

The Board discussed the data related to the town centre indicators in detail and raised concerns that it did not accurately reflect the true feelings of residents. Members noted that they had received numerous comments that indicated that views of the town centre might be more negative than what had been recorded. Ms Henshaw advised that views of residents would be sought through surveys carried out in the town centre and further concern was raised that the data recorded would therefore not reflect the views of residents who had already decided not to visit the town centre and those working in the town centre. Members requested that consideration be given to the concerns raised and that Ms Henshaw work with relevant Council officers in order to review the way in which residents' views of the town centre were sought, reporting back to the next meeting of the Board.

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The key objective that Blackpool be the number one tourist destination in the UK was discussed and Members queried what steps were required in order to ensure that this objective was achieved and it was commented that how data could be utilised to demonstrate that the objective had been achieved must be considered.

A number of questions that could not be answered without further information being sought were identified, as recorded below. It was agreed that an answer would be provided in writing following the meeting:

- The number of jobs created for Blackpool and FY postcode residents at Blackpool Enterprise Zone.
- The reasons why the data relating to Adult Social Care discharge delays was not being recorded and when this would resume.
- The financial cost to the Council of the 183 Looked After Children from outside of the FY post code.

The Committee agreed:

1. That Ms Henshaw work with relevant Council officers in order to review the way in which residents' views of the town centre were sought, reporting back to the next meeting of the Board.
2. The answers to the questions identified be provided in writing following the meeting.

5 GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT

Ms Annie Heslop, Green Infrastructure Development Manager introduced the report and highlighted a number of key developments since the last report to the Board in progressing the numerous actions contained within the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy. She advised that the future priorities included compiling park development plans for each park, increased marketing, improved website and an ecological review of key sites.

Members noted the success of the Park Ranger Scheme and queried whether it could be extended beyond the original BetterStart wards. In response, Ms Heslop advised that the Council was considering how the provision could be increased across the town through adapting the Ranger programme to urban parks and community gardens.

The Board highlighted particular areas of concern, where green space had been flooded and made unusable and potentially dangerous, particularly around Herons Reach and Marton Mere Nature Reserve. Ms Heslop noted the areas highlighted and advised that a number of council services were looking at changes made by Marton Mere Caravan Park, following concerns raised by Natural England due to the potential wider impact on wildlife and the SSSI status of the site. Ms Heslop also advised that the town wide Ecological Review that would be undertaken in the next 12 months would include a detailed review and development of a management plan for Marton Mere to ensure the space was managed correctly to maintain and enhance this ecological space.

The actions related to allotments were noted and in response to additional questions, Ms Lisa Arnold, Head of Leisure and Catering Services advised that allotments in Blackpool were currently self-managed and therefore the Council did not hold a list of registered

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interest. The allotment associations were constituted organisations and the Council worked with them to ensure robust processes were in place. If any new locations were identified within the town for additional allotments these would also be self-managed.

The Board discussed Stanley Park Lake in detail and the issues caused by the fast growing weeds. It was noted that the Council had been unsuccessful thus far in seeking funding to dredge the lake, which was seen as the only way in which the problem would be solved long term. The cost of dredging the lake was noted to be approximately £1 million and the timescale for the work was dependent on when funding became available and when the Council was successful in applying for that funding. It was noted that various angles would be explored when seeking funding included sports grants, historic, flooding and biodiversity due to the prominence of the lake. Members also suggested that the Council seek to utilise social value returns gained through procurement and development for the lake if possible and Ms Heslop agreed to explore this idea with the new Social Value Officer.

The issue of declining numbers of volunteers was also discussed in detail with ideas considered with a view to increase community involvement in the parks. It was suggested that a Parks Foundation would be a useful introduction in order to take responsibility for all open spaces without an already organised parks group in place in order to mobilise individuals.

6 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORKPLANS

The Scrutiny Leadership Board considered its workplan and those of the Scrutiny Committees. It was agreed that a further update on the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy be included in approximately six months.

7 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The date and time of the next formal meeting of the Scrutiny Leadership Board was noted as 13 July 2022, subject to confirmation at Annual Council.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.39 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:

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