

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 29 JUNE 2022**

Present:

Councillor Jackson (in the Chair)

Councillors

Galley	Kirkland	R Scott
Hutton	M Mitchell	Walsh

In Attendance:

Councillor Mrs Maxine Callow, Scrutiny Lead Member

Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Job Creation

Councillor Neal Brookes, Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Public Safety, Highways and Transport

Councillor Jo Farrell, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, and Community Health and Wellbeing

Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration

Lisa Arnold, Head of Community and Wellbeing Services

Scott Butterfield, Strategy, Policy and Research Manager

Ian Large, Engineering Manager

Michael Dulku, Leisure Facilities Manager

Laura Ivinson, Active Communities Service Manager

John Greenbank, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser (Scrutiny)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Paul Galley declared a personal interest in respect of item 8, Climate Emergency Update, the nature of the interest that he was Chair of the Blackpool Transport Company Ltd Board, as the company was involved in the Zero-Emissions Bus Regional Area project.

Councillor Adrian Hutton declared a personal interest in respect of item 9, Public Rights of Way Update, the nature of the interest that he was Chair of Blackpool Waste Services Ltd Board (Enveco), as the company was involved in the grounds maintenance of footpaths.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 30 MARCH 2022

The minutes of the last meeting held on 30 March 2022 were agreed as a true and correct record.

3 PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no applications for public speaking on this occasion.

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4 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Executive and Cabinet Members Decisions taken since the last meeting.

A query was raised in respect of EX16/2022, Community Safety Plan 2022-2025, regarding how success against the plan's priorities would be measured, taking into account that the Council was not responsible for many of the areas of work. Councillor Neal Brookes, Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Public Safety, Highways and Transport, responded that although there was no formal metric to measure success against, the Community Safety Partnership would be developing an action plan to ensure that work to address the identified priorities was taking place and allow an overview of progress. It was expected that this would allow an assessment of progress in 2023.

The Committee also discussed EX19/2022, Levelling Up Fund Round 2, in relation to the Multiversity project. It was noted that the finance for the land to build the Multiversity had been agreed and Members questioned what would occur in the event that the project did not go forward. Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Job Creation, explained that although the Multiversity project was expected to be delivered, in the event it was not, the land would be used to deliver an alternative regeneration project. It was also queried what would occur if the land for the project was obtained by another private party before the Council. In the event that this occurred, which was considered unlikely, Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration, explained that Compulsory Purchase Orders could be used to secure the land.

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan July 2022 – October 2022 of upcoming decisions.

Members made the suggestion that details of how upcoming executive decisions related to the various strategies and policies of the Council be included in the Forward Plan. It was thought that this would demonstrate how decisions furthered the strategic aims of the Council and allow more informed scrutiny of what was being agreed. It was noted that this request would need to be considered outside of the meeting.

The future of the bridge on Bank Hey Street was discussed by the Committee in relation to the decision to be taken on investment in the Town Centre, with Members noting plans to remove it. Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration responded to advise that the bridge was owned by the Council but that neighbouring properties had a right of access to it. These rights included a fire escape, and clarification on how different parties' rights would be affected going forward would need to be resolved. However, Mr Cavill stated that it was expected that these would be resolved before the nearby ShowTime museum was opened in 2023.

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6 LEISURE SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT

Ms Lisa Arnold, Head of Community and Wellbeing Services, presented the Leisure Services Annual Report. The report detailed the work undertaken in 2021/2022, Covid recovery, key performance indicators and future plans.

Mr Michael Dulku, Leisure Facilities Manager, informed the Committee that overall attendance at leisure facilities had returned to 74% of its pre-Covid levels, ahead of the national average of 64%. This had been as a result of a strong return to swimming pools, in part due to the investment at Palatine Road. The recovery had been more varied in gyms and exercise classes, with 72% of pre-Covid levels which was below the national average. This had been attributed to the break during Covid where many people had ceased exercise activity and were therefore unlikely to return to exercise at the same intensity as pre-Covid. It was hoped that an offer of lower intensity classes would assist in addressing this issue.

The challenges faced by the service were also outlined by Mr Dulku. This included the need for further investment in maintenance and facilities, rising energy costs and a national shortage of swimming pool cleaning chemicals. A further issue identified was the retention of staff, a number of whom had left during the pandemic. In order to address this consideration was being given to developing a professional career pathway to improve employee's personal development with the Council.

Work was also underway to increase customer engagement to determine what residents wanted from their leisure facilities following Covid. This was being achieved through a target survey and face-to-face meetings.

Greater automation was highlighted for the future of the services as footfall at facilities increased. Mr Dulku explained that this would allow online bookings and access to facilities without going to a reception desk. Making access to exercise easier and quicker.

Ms Laura Ivinson, Active Communities Service Manager, provided an overview of the work being undertaken by Active Communities following Covid. She reported that during Covid the service had focussed on outreach into the community to determine what activities people wanted delivered. Following the re-opening of services post-Covid activity had increased, with Ms Ivinson highlighting that Learn2Swim had returned to pre-Covid levels and school swimming had fully opened. It was also noted that Learn2Swim sessions were now exclusive for those taking part, instead of having part of the pool for public swimming. This meant that more children could access the programme in each session.

Health referrals were also raised as an issue, with numbers being slower to recover due to a decline in the number of GPs. However the service recognised that this was an important area work and further consideration would be undertaken into how to increase the number of referrals where possible.

Engagement was taking place with schools encouraging walking to schools and the use of bikes. A programme of summer holiday activities had also been organised including a package for those with Special Educational Needs and Disability.

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The Committee queried how Leisure Services' Gym offer compared with private providers in Blackpool. In response, Mr Dulku explained that private gyms had a specific market targeting the 15% of people who were already active. Leisure Services however looked to encourage activity in the remaining 85% who were less active. Therefore competition with private providers was not sought and the focus was on engaging people to become more active.

Maintenance and investment in facilities was also discussed, with Ms Arnold informing the Committee that this mainly concerned the replacement of aging equipment. Procurement of equipment needed a sixteen week lead in and the Council sought to ensure that new equipment was also carbon friendly to meet climate emergency targets. This meant that procurement was a lengthy process. Limited resources also meant that the Council needed to prioritise which equipment would be replaced and what maintenance would take place.

The cleaning of Stanley Park Lake to allow its use for leisure activities was also raised. Ms Arnold reported that a working group had been established to look at what would need to be undertaken before dredging could take place and identify any challenges that could arise. It was also noted that the funding for the project needed to be identified.

The ongoing cost of living crisis was also raised as a significant challenge facing Leisure Services. Due to rising household bills the Committee recognised that residents could be less able to pay for leisure activities. Ms Arnold informed the Committee that the service was aware of this challenge, but time would be needed to understand its impact on the Council's leisure offer.

Opportunities for older and younger residents in non-traditional sports were discussed by the Committee, with Ms Ivinson explaining that the youth games had been held recently that had involved young people from across Lancashire. The high ropes at the Leisure Centre were also noted as a non-traditional leisure opportunity that had proved popular. Ms Ivinson also informed the Committee that sport camps had been organised during the summer holidays in conjunction with local sports clubs and other providers.

Looking to the future Ms Arnold explained to the Committee that the service aimed to encourage people to become more active. This was a refocus from previously aiming to compete with the private sector. This included seeking to embed leisure and healthy living across the Council as well as the community. Opportunities were also being sought with the NHS and other partners to co-locate services at leisure facilities.

The Committee also asked if more free outdoor equipment could be provided to encourage people to use and exercise. Ms Arnold confirmed that the Council was looking at a variety of ways, such as community engagement, to encourage greater use of outdoor facilities and parks.

7 ENGAGEMENT OF CONSULTANTS ANNUAL REPORT

Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources, presented the Engagement of Consultants Annual Report. He highlighted that the overall spend on external consultants had fallen

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from £3.9m to £3.1m. The majority of the spend had been on capital projects and showed the Council's significant investment in this area. Mr Thompson also noted that consultants were often important to deliver large projects and that work would be undertaken to include more details on consultants work in the Council's Contracts Register.

The possibility of the Council employing an in-house Capital Projects team was raised by the Committee, querying if it would be more cost effective than the use of external consultants. In response to this Mr Thompson stated that if a clear cost benefit could be established then the Council would consider this as an option.

The Committee also asked if a copy of the Code of Practice for Engaging Consultants could be provided for members to allow an understanding of the process of appointing an external consultant.

The Committee agreed:

1. The report be noted; and
2. That Mr Thompson provide a copy of the Code of Practice for Engaging Consultants to Members of the Committee for information.

8 CLIMATE EMERGENCY UPDATE

Mr Scott Butterfield, Strategy, Policy and Research Manager, presented an update on the work being undertaken to meet the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency. He informed the Committee that a Climate Action Plan had been approved in December 2021 and a Carbon Emissions Internal Audit had been undertaken. He explained that the Action Plan had been developed as a result of input from the Climate Assembly and evidence from consultants using science-based targets. The action plan included actions identified by the public as well as those directly seeking to reduce carbon emissions at the Council and across Blackpool more widely. A review all the Council's policies and strategies to check their compatibility with climate goals had been completed.

Of the actions contained in the Action Plan 56 were shown as completed, 54 were in progress and 16 were not complete/not started. Mr Butterfield explained that many of actions shown as not complete were ongoing with the required work to make progress under consideration and that many could be changed to completed in a short period of time.

The Committee discussed the development of the supporting infrastructure for electric vehicles (EVs) in Blackpool. Mr Butterfield informed the Committee that the Council was looking at investment in further charging points and noted that private sector investment had been lower than elsewhere in the UK. He also highlighted that a national EV Fund would be launched, from which the Council would apply for funds.

The development of an EV Strategy for Blackpool was discussed, where Mr Butterfield explained that work was needed to understand how EV technology would develop, the impact on Blackpool's electricity capacity and the role of the private sector, before a strategy could be drafted. Mr Butterfield reported that a public consultation would be

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held over the summer on the strategy. Discussions had also been held with taxi operators to help understand the challenges of switching to EVs for Blackpool and possible solutions.

The rising cost of energy as part of the cost of living crisis was raised as a significant challenge going forward, with many people choosing to wait to replace older technology such as boilers to reduce their personal costs. To address this Mr Butterfield explained to Members that work was needed to understand the development of the energy market and the use of increasingly profitable energy sources like solar and wind power. Awareness of when many boilers might reach their end of life was also important and access to government funding would assist in encouraging people to buy more energy efficient alternatives.

Planning restrictions were also discussed by Members and the issues that they could cause. Mr Butterfield noted that the new National Energy Strategy would consult on the development of onshore wind generation projects where community support existed, highlighting that local and national attitudes to the climate emergency were changing favourably.

9 PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY UPDATE

Mr Ian Large, Engineering Manager, presented an update on work to maintain Blackpool's forty-seven public rights of way (PROWs). He reported that six of the eight PROWs had been cleared and reopened since 2021 and that work to reopen the remaining two was underway.

Enveco had been engaged to assist the Council in the work to clear PROWs and Mr Large reported that it was the best placed partner to undertake this work.

The Council had also worked to improve its dialogue with private landowners, close to and crossed by PROWs, to ensure that they met their responsibilities to keep paths clear. It was reported that this had been positive and land owners had shown a willingness to support this work.

The use of footpaths by individuals on horses was raised as an issue, with Members asking if more signage was required. Mr Large responded that signage had already been installed on Marton Moss and consideration could be given to its installation elsewhere.

The budget for PROWs work was discussed by the Committee, with Mr Large explaining that £40k had been allocated as part of the Highways Service budget. Mr Thompson, Director of Resources, added that this had partly also been provided by the Estates Services, where income from investment properties had been used to support PROWs.

The Committee welcomed the report and asked that going forward an annual update be added to the work programme so that scrutiny of PROWs could continue.

The Committee agreed:

1. That the report be noted; and

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2. That an Annual Report of Public Rights of Way be added to the Committee's Work Programme.

10 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee considered its work programme for 2022-2023. Members were informed that the work programme had been developed following a workshop in June 2022 and input from the Committee.

Members of the Committee asked that a briefing be organised to gain information on Community Wealth Building. It was noted that this had been successfully undertaken in Preston and the Committee sought further information on how it could be applied to Blackpool.

The Committee agreed: That with the inclusion of a briefing on Community Wealth Building the Committee Work Programme 2022-2023 be approved.

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date and time of the next meeting of the Committee was noted as Wednesday, 28 September 2022, at 6.00pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 8.00 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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