

**MINUTES OF LEVELLING UP SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 8 NOVEMBER
2023**

Present:

Councillor S Smith (in the Chair)

Councillors

Boughton
Hoyle

Humphreys
B Mitchell

D Scott
Thomas

Wilshaw

In Attendance:

Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications

Ms Vikki Piper, Head of Housing

Ms Liz Petch, Consultant in Public Health

Ms Jodie Stephenson, Democratic Services Senior Advisor

Councillor Paul Galley, Chair of the Scrutiny Leadership Board

Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Levelling-Up - Place

Councillor Lynn Williams, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Tourism, Arts and Culture

Ms Vicky Leake, Y-LET Coordinator, Streetlife

Ms Stacey Taylor, Y-LET Coordinator, Streetlife

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

2 PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no requests from members of the public to speak on this occasion.

3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 4 OCTOBER 2023

The Committee considered the minutes of the last meeting held on 4 October 2023 and requested that the following wording be added to the third paragraph of Item 7 – Levelling Up – Housing Update;

“The Chairman raised concerns regarding the impact and capacity of the additional support on the team, the Committee was reassured that there were sufficient levels of staff in place.”

Subject to this amendment, the Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting held

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on 4 October 2023 be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

4 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

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

Members discussed EX39/2023, Town Centre Investment - The Post Office project. Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration confirmed that the Council would own the building however, once the project was complete the hotel would be run by a professional hotel management company.

The Committee raised a number of concerns regarding EX38/2023 and the process for Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) and the affect this could have on housing and homelessness. Mr Cavill advised Members that there would be 66 properties affected, consisting of houses, flats, houses of multiple occupancy and small businesses. All affected tenants had been contacted via written communication. The Council had received significant engagement from tenants and business owners who had been offered additional support and advice. Negotiations had been progressing well and a number of properties had been sold voluntarily. The CPO would be the final step in the event of negotiations being unsuccessful.

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the contents of the Council's Forward Plan November 2023 to February 2024, relating to the portfolios of the Cabinet Members whose responsibilities fell within its remit and noted the upcoming items.

The Committee discussed the Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) for the Revoe area. Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Levelling-Up Place, confirmed that the project affected a much smaller number of properties, predominantly businesses and landlords. Close communication and support was being offered to those involved and the CPOs would be a final step.

6 LEVELLING-UP UPDATE

Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration, provided the Committee with a verbal update on Levelling-Up in Blackpool.

Mr Cavill notified the Committee that a number of Levelling-Up projects were in the final stages of development and on schedule to open for Easter 2024:

- Holiday Inn
- Cinema
- Houndshill Shopping Centre extension
- Central carpark (handover January 2024, for opening Easter 2024)

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The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) development was progressing well and ahead of schedule by approximately ten weeks.

Showtown Blackpool - The Blackpool Museum project scheduled to open on 15 March 2024.

A discussion took place regarding the Central car park development, Mr Cavill advised that the car park would be leased from a pension fund on a 30 year contract with a chance to purchase at the end of the agreement.

7 TOURISM PERFORMANCE UPDATE

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications, gave a detailed update on the performance during the main tourism season from April 2023 to the end of August 2023. This included key performance indicators, details of the major events programme, marketing activity, investment in Illuminations and progress on developing business tourism.

He explained that the annual STEAM data for 2022 was not available at the time of the meeting but would be released in a number of weeks. Indicators for 2023 to date suggested a successful season for Blackpool. The various performance data received demonstrated that the free events provided by VisitBlackpool had proved a success and significantly increased visitor numbers.

The Committee enquired as to the possibility of using silent fireworks at future firework championship events. Mr Welsh assured the Committee that the Council worked closely with the provider for whom social responsibility was a priority, and that the production was under regular review taking into consideration, noise and the potential for eco-friendly options.

Members discussed the true impact and value of free events on Blackpool, and whether the output was conducive for the town.

The Committee agreed:

1. That the Tourism Performance update be noted
2. To request that the next tourism performance report include additional information regarding the true value and impact of providing the free events in Blackpool and how this would be measured.

(Mr Philip Welsh and Councillor Lynn Williams left the meeting on conclusion of this item)

8 HEALTHY WEIGHT STRATEGY 2023-2028

Ms Liz Petch, Consultant in Public Health gave an overview of the progress against the recommendations following the Health Weight Scrutiny Review.

The Healthy Weight Strategy was discussed in detail and Members acknowledged the

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barriers in place with regards to the success of a Healthy Weight Strategy for Blackpool and the validity of the proposed recommendations.

Healthy eating, was recognised as the main barrier in the current economic climate. Ms Petch confirmed that the strategy tackled concerns with poor nutrition and insufficient cooking skills and facilities, targeting school aged children.

Concern was raised regarding housing with no cooking facilities, Ms Vikki Piper, Head of Housing advised that this was the case within all social housing properties and often the case within private rented properties. Ms Piper advised that voluntary sector grants were accessible for cooking facilities. Ms Vicky Leake, Young Lived Experience team (Y-LET) Coordinator, Streetlife added that they were able to offer assistance with regards to microwaves, kettles and air fryers.

Ms Piper also informed the Committee a pilot was underway with regards to fully furnished tenancies. This was at a very early stage and it would be sometime before the project could be evaluated.

Members recognised that co-production and cross sector working would be essential to achieve the recommendations in the strategy, along with support from national government.

Ms Petch advised that whilst the strategy was a five year document, due to the nature and the target audience (e.g. school children), it would be difficult to measure effects on healthy weight within the life of the document.

Progress would be evaluated and monitored against a specific programmes of work and interventions using surveys, physical activity records, GP patient data etc.

Members raised concern with regards to the vision statement, and the need for this to be more detailed and direct.

The Committee agreed:

1. To sign off the Healthy Weight Scrutiny Review Recommendations as completed.
2. To support the Health Weight Strategy document subject to the following considerations:
 - More detail be provided with regards to evaluation and data information,
 - The need for a more direct vision statement.

9 ENGAGEMENT OF CONSULTANTS ANNUAL REPORT

Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration, presented a report outlining the level of third party spend on external consultants during 2022/23.

The Committee requested that the details of the individual procurement process used for each project to be added to the report.

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The Committee agreed:

1. To note the annual spend paid to external consultants during 2022/23.
2. To receive an updated version of the report with the procurement details following the meeting.

10 HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS ANNUAL REPORT

Ms Vikki Piper, Head of Housing presented the Housing and Homelessness Annual Report.

The Committee discussed the period of significant change in housing. With regards to the changes in three key pieces of emerging legislation, the Council felt that the changes should have a positive impact for Blackpool.

Members highlighted the limitations for building new property within Blackpool, in response Ms Piper advised that the main obstacle was due to lack of land availability. The Committee noted the high percentage of the private rented sector within Blackpool and was advised that this characteristic was due to the historic decline in holiday accommodation coupled with the business model available in Blackpool which allowed for properties to be bought at a relatively low-price and rented out at a significant profit by private landlords.

Discussion regarding the Housing Register took place, Ms Piper reported that the current number of people on the register was approximately 12,000, however the data had not been cleansed to remove out-of-date information for some time. She also advised that the number within the priority category was approximately 6,000.

Members discussed the rough sleeper data and Ms Piper confirmed that the Council had been proactive and had a very solid multi agency approach to this issue.

Ms Vikki Piper, Head of Housing advised that approximately 60 families were being supported with homelessness at that time, Members enquired as to how long the support would last for each individual family.

The Salvation Army had submitted a written report which was considered by the Committee. The main issue raised in the report regarded the coalition between the voluntary sector, stakeholders and the local authority, Ms Vicky Leake, Y-LET Coordinator added that she supported this concern but also advised that partnership working in Housing Options had improved considerably over the last two years. Both the Streetlife representative and Ms Piper agreed that data sharing arrangements were in place.

In respect of Winter Provision for rough sleepers, Ms Piper advised this had always been a partnership response between the local authority and voluntary sector, but that during Covid, the shift in responsibilities changed to predominantly the local authority and extra funding was provided. This had started to re-balance now and a number of providers were offering help with space and volunteers.

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Captain (Dr) John Clifton, The Salvation Army advised that he had been informed that Blackpool Council was no longer able to provide financial support for the extended winter provision to provide continual safe sleeping spaces for people who were street homeless during the cold weather. Captain (Dr) Clifton advised that The Salvation Army was dedicated to exploring alternative funding avenues and collaborative approaches to ensure the continuity of winter provision; however, he urged the Council to re-evaluate the funding decision.

The Decent Homes Standard Pilot was also discussed, with Ms Piper acknowledging the concerns of the Committee with regards to the possible increase in homelessness.

Ms Piper informed the Committee that Housing Options staff had received Trauma Informed Training, but more work was needed to recognise and support staff exposed to second hand trauma. She advised that a training programme had commenced across the sector, that additional training would be provided by an external provider and that staff wellbeing was also a priority in this area.

The Committee agreed: To note the Housing and Homelessness update.

11 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee considered the Scrutiny Workplan Report for 2023/2024 and noted the items within.

12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 24 JANUARY 2024

The date and time of the next meeting was noted as Wednesday 24 January 2024 at 6.00pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 8.18 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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