

Report to:	SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Item number	7
Relevant Officer:	Chris Kelly, Senior Democratic Services Adviser (Scrutiny)
Date of Meeting	19 th June 2014

OUTSIDE BODIES SCRUTINY PANEL

1.0 Purpose of the report:

- 1.1 The Committee to consider a report from the Outside Bodies Scrutiny Panel, following the Panel's meeting with representatives from the Blackpool Fylde and Wyre Economic Development Company.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

- 2.1 To note the report of the Outside Bodies Scrutiny Review Panel.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

- 3.1 At its meeting on 29th March 2012, the Scrutiny Committee appointed a Panel to scrutinise outside bodies. This report is presented to provide an update on the work that has been undertaken by the Scrutiny Panel.

- 3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

- 3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

- 3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:

Not applicable, the report is to note.

4.0 Council Priority:

4.1 The relevant Council Priorities are:

- Attract sustainable investment and create quality jobs
- Encourage responsible entrepreneurship for the benefit of our communities

5.0 Background Information

5.1 The objective of the Panel for this meeting was to consider an overview of the operations and activities of Blackpool Fylde and Wyre Economic Development Company and to scrutinise details of its strategies/policies for the future direction of the company.

5.2 **Date:** Monday 28th April 2014, commencing 10.00 a.m.

5.3 **Panel Members present:** Councillors Elmes (Lead Member), Green, Lee, M. Mitchell, O'Hara and Stansfield

5.4 **Also present:** Alan Cavill, Assistant Chief Executive – Regeneration, Tourism and Culture, Blackpool Council.
Rob Green, Head of Enterprise and Investment, Blackpool Council.
Chris Kelly, Senior Democratic Services Adviser (Scrutiny), Blackpool Council.

5.5 **Apologies for absence:** Received from Councillors Mrs Callow and Hutton.

6.0 Meeting Report

6.1 Mr Cavill and Mr Green provided the Panel with a presentation on the Blackpool Fylde and Wyre Economic Development Company. The Panel was advised that the Economic Development Company was owned by the four Fylde coast local authorities; Blackpool, Fylde, Wyre and Lancashire. It was explained that the company was limited by guarantee and that it had a Board consisting of eight directors, four from the private sector and the four Chief Executives of the local authorities.

6.2 The geographic boundaries of the company's area were discussed with the Panel, with it being noted that, whilst Blackpool had the most concentrated population, it did not have many potential sites to develop for economic activity. It was reported to the Panel that many of the development sites in the company's area were to the south and that, although not in Blackpool, this situation remained beneficial to Blackpool residents as many of the jobs associated with the sites were undertaken by people living in Blackpool.

- 6.3 It was explained that the company worked closely with Lancashire County Council to develop strategic sites and infrastructure and that the company undertook a brokering role by identifying potential investors and developers. The Panel also considered the work undertaken by the company to increase the skills of the labour market in the area and noted the commissioned report on the 'Future Skills Requirements for the Advanced Manufacturing and Energy Sectors on the Fylde.' The Panel was advised that there was a potential for increasing engineering jobs on the Fylde coast.
- 6.4 The growth sectors of the area were discussed and it was explained to the Panel that the main areas of growth had been in the tourism and food and drink sectors. There had also been growth in the energy sector, in which there were now 80 companies from the sector based in the area. The Panel was advised that the natural geography of the region meant it was a key potential site for both renewable and non-renewable energy sources, and that the company worked with local universities in order to develop workforce skills in order to take advantage of the natural resources.
- 6.5 The Panel discussed the potential options for conference facilities. Mr Cavill reported that there were now many locations throughout the country able to offer excellent facilities for large-scale political conferences, as had been held in Blackpool in the past. It was estimated that to upgrade facilities in order to be able to host such events, an investment of £60 - £100 million would be required. It was considered that an investment of £14 - £16 million would allow for the development of facilities in order to provide for bespoke / association events that would require a 1500 – 2000 capacity venue, which would be larger than most hotels and other venues were able to offer. It was considered that catering for this market of conferences would be pitching the town's potential facilities at a more appropriate level.
- 6.6 The retail offer of the town centre was discussed by the Panel and it was reported that creating and finding suitable sites to meet the modern needs of the retail industry was a constant challenge, made more difficult by the multiplicity of ownerships of town centre property. The Panel noted that there were a lot of food outlets / chain restaurants not in Blackpool that were in other regional towns of similar size. It was reported that various opportunities were being considered by the Economic Development Company, which included future options for the Tower Lounge. Mr Green advised that the Economic Development Company needed to be pro-active in encouraging some companies to locate in the town and that, should those companies be successful, other similar companies would be more attracted to also establish their business in the town.
- 6.7 Mr Green provided the Panel with details of the recent activities of the Economic Development Company. The Panel was also provided with an explanation and details of the bid to become an EU assisted area, which, although not providing funding in itself, would provide benefits for companies looking to establish sites in the area and

enable inward investment projects to become more viable. Mr Green advised that there would hopefully be an announcement on this in the coming weeks.

- 6.8 The Panel discussed the redevelopment opportunities that were being proposed for Blackpool Airport and the M55 corridor. The potential job creation benefits from shale gas extraction were also discussed, with it being reported that, although there would be no extraction operations in Blackpool, there would be a potential for the regulators of the industry to be based in Blackpool. This would create a number of highly-qualified, long-term jobs in the town. Members considered that any future development of the shale gas industry faced considerable challenges with regards to public perception. It was therefore considered that ensuring Members were fully informed of the issues relating to the industry was highly important, given the role councillors played in providing links to the community

Does the information submitted include any exempt information?

No

List of Appendices:

None.

6.0 Legal considerations:

6.1 Not applicable.

7.0 Human Resources considerations:

7.1 Not applicable.

8.0 Equalities considerations:

8.1 Not applicable.

9.0 Financial considerations:

9.1 Not applicable.

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 Not applicable.

11.0 Ethical considerations:

11.1 Not applicable.

12.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

12.1 Not applicable.

13.0 Background papers:

13.1 Notes of the Outside Bodies Scrutiny Panel – Blackpool Fylde and Wyre Economic Development Company