

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -  
THURSDAY, 31 MARCH 2016**

**Present:**

Councillor Hunter (in the Chair)

Councillors

Mrs Callow JP	G Coleman	Matthews	Rowson
D Coleman	Galley	Robertson BEM	

**In Attendance:**

Councillor Simon Blackburn, Leader of the Council  
Councillor Fred Jackson, Cabinet Member for Municipal Assets  
Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Business and Economic Development  
Councillor Mrs Christine Wright, Cabinet Member for Housing, Procurement and Income Generation

Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources  
Mr Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Regulatory Services  
Mr John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services  
Mr William Britain, Head of Highway and Traffic Management Services  
Mrs Clare Nolan Barnes, Head of Coastal and Environmental Partnership Investments  
Mr Chris Kelly, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser (Scrutiny)

Councillor Vikki Singleton

**1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

**2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 21 JANUARY 2016**

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the Tourism, Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21 January 2016, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**3 PUBLIC SPEAKING**

The Committee noted that there were no applications to speak by members of the public on this occasion.

**4 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS**

The Committee considered the Executive and Cabinet Member decisions within the portfolios of the Leader of the Council and Deputy Leader of the Council, taken since the last meeting of the Committee.

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In regards to decision number PH4/2016 'Review of Blackpool Libraries Opening Hours', Members raised questions relating to the use of volunteers to staff libraries. The Leader of the Council advised that volunteers were used to staff libraries and that it would be an aim to use volunteers more extensively in future.

The Committee raised questions in relation to decision number PH12/2016 'Fees and Charges – Democratic Governance' and Mr Towers, Director of Governance and Regulatory Services explained that there was an obligation to sell the edited electoral register in certain formats, the fees for which were set by statute.

Members raised questions in relation to decision number EX20/2016 'Vehicle Replacement for Street Cleansing and Illuminations' and Mr Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services, advised that the newly purchased vehicles would have a five year guarantee.

In regards to decision number PH5/2016 'Purchase of Property 180-182 Promenade', Members raised questions in relation to the loan repayment costs. Councillor Jackson, Cabinet Member for Municipal Assets provided details of the purchase costs of the property and details of the lease payable by the Community Interest Company set up by Left Coast. Mr Thompson, Director of Resources, explained that the funding arrangement would be met at least by the rental income and also advised that the business to be conducted from the property would generate additional business rates. The Committee requested that further details be provided on the borrowing costs for the purchase of the property.

The Committee agreed:

- 1) To request that further details be provided on the borrowing costs for the purchase of 180-182 Promenade, to be circulated to Members after the meeting.
- 2) To note the Executive and Cabinet Member Decisions.

## **5 FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the items contained within the Forward Plan, April 2016 – July 2016, relating to the portfolios of the Leader of the Council and Deputy Leader of the Council.

The Committee agreed to note the Forward Plan items.

## **6 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE MONITORING AS AT MONTH 10 2015/2016**

The Committee was presented with the Financial Performance Monitoring Report as at month 10, which set out the summary revenue budget position for the Council and the individual directorates for the period April 2015 – January 2016, together with an outlook for the remainder of the year.

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Members noted the position in relation to the working balances and raised questions in regards to the plans to improve working balances in the next financial year. The Leader of the Council advised the Committee of plans to re-profile the repayment of the Council's debt using Minimum Revenue Provision restructuring. He provided the Committee with details, noting that whilst it would extend the period of repayments of debt from 25 to 50 years, it would pay off debt completely unlike the current arrangement, whilst releasing resources to increase reserves.

The Committee raised questions relating to the consistent overspend in Children's Services and challenged the plans to alleviate the budgetary position of the directorate in the future. The Leader of the Council agreed that the consistent overspend of the directorate was a concern and explained that there was a legal duty to provide services for Looked After Children and that whilst the numbers of Looked After Children had stabilised at approximately 450 for the past year, the increasing costs were due to the increasingly complex nature of placements required.

The Leader of the Council reported to the Committee that there had been a significant number of large families, some of whom had moved into the borough with all of the children needing to be taken into care. It was noted that in certain cases, the extensive work of Children's Services' Early Help was missed and was not able to have an impact upon the families moving into the borough, with children already at an older age and having chaotic lifestyles. The Committee discussed the impact of transience on Children's Services and noted the objective to find people moving into the borough and to encourage their return to their home local authority, where appropriate.

It was also explained to the Committee that work was being undertaken through the Selective Licensing programme, one of the objectives of which was to reduce the amount of cheap, readily available, poor quality accommodation in the private rental sector. He also advised Members of the work that was being undertaken in the town to improve public sector housing stock.

The Committee questioned whether Members' ward budgets could be utilised to absorb some of the cost pressures relating to the budget for Community and Environmental Services. The Leader of the Council noted that Members' ward budgets had recently been reduced and he considered that whilst some individual Members may wish to allocate their ward budgets in such a way, other Members had various other priorities, for which they would prefer to allocate funding.

Members noted the budgetary pressures for Community and Environmental Services, specifically in Transport for £60,000 due to the movement of the Shelters budget from Travel and Road Safety. The Committee raised questions regarding the level of income received from advertisements on bus shelters and the Leader of the Council confirmed that income was received from bus shelter advertisements, whilst Blackpool Transport Services received income from advertisements on buses and trams. However, it was acknowledged that the income target for advertisement revenue from bus shelters was ambitious in the current economic climate.

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Members also raised questions in relation to Concessionary Fares and Mr Thompson advised that Blackpool had the highest take-up of concessionary fare NoW cards across Lancashire and Cumbria.

The Committee noted the impact of historic and in-year academy conversions on the level of Education Services Grant received and queried what the impact would be of recent government proposals to convert all schools to academies. The Leader of the Council considered that the only services that would be provided for academies would be the services for which academies were prepared to pay. He considered that the Council offered quality education services to schools that were priced at an appropriate level. However, there would inevitably be difficulties when competing on price with the private sector to provide services. He considered that the issue would create further difficulties in regards to overseeing school improvement in the town.

Members challenged the reasons for the reduction in Council Tax collection rate and the Leader of the Council advised that the principal cause was the introduction of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. He provided the Committee with details of the work that was undertaken in order to recover debt and arrears.

The Committee agreed to request that in respect of reports detailing collection rates of Council Tax and Business Rates, information also be provided regarding the total cash amounts as well as the percentage collection rate.

## **7 ROAD ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

Mr Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services, presented a report to the Committee on the Road Asset Management Strategy. He explained that the Road Asset Management Strategy was intended to set out the aims, objectives and processes involved in managing Blackpool's highway network and that the development of a strategy was now a statutory requirement placed on every local highway authority and formed part of the new funding model.

The Committee was provided with further details regarding the importance of the Strategy and Mr Blackledge advised that the Department for Transport had moved towards incentivising local authorities to adopt long term strategic planning via their respective Highways Asset Management Plans. As such, the plans and strategies would be scored and categorised into Bands, 1, 2, or 3 (3 being the best score), denoting the assessment of the quality of each plan. Based on the scoring, incentive funding would be calculated and allocated. Mr Blackledge considered that he currently expected the Strategy to achieve Band 2. He outlined the need for the service to build on its reputation as a leader in Highways Asset Management and develop the Centre of Excellence approach, in order to achieve Band 3 in the future.

Mr Blackledge explained that the aims of the Road Asset Management Strategy were to implement interventions at the appropriate time and to encourage all stakeholders to strike a balance between the need for immediate pothole repairs to ensure the safety of road users and 'right first time' solutions that provided better value for money. He noted

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that the Strategy would include a return to the 'social network', whereby the most socially important roads in each ward would be prioritised, given the limited funding for repairs. The Committee was also advised that a key aspect to the Strategy would be to maintain assets that had safety implications, such as zebra crossings, mini roundabouts and essential road markings.

The Committee discussed engagement with the public and it was considered that Members had a role in providing explanations to the public regarding the prioritisation of repair work, conducted according to the Strategy.

In response to questions from the Committee, Mr Britain, Head of Highway and Traffic Management Services, advised that the Treasury had set the funding levels for the next five years and that, as a result of the difficulties in achieving a Band 3, a high proportion of local authorities would be assessed as being Bands 1 or 2.

The Committee noted that the Strategy was due to be considered by the Executive at its meeting on 4 April 2016. In anticipation of its approval, Members considered that future scrutiny of the impact of the Roads Asset Management Strategy would be important.

The Committee agreed to request that a report demonstrating the impact of the Roads Asset Management Strategy be provided to a future meeting, once data on the impact was available.

Background papers: The Road Asset Management Strategy.

## **8 FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT**

Mrs Nolan Barnes, Head of Coastal and Environmental Partnership Investments, presented a report to the Committee that outlined the delivery of the statutory duties in respect of flood risk management.

The Committee was advised of the statutory duties set out in the Flood Risk Regulations 2009, the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and the Flood Risk Management Overview and Scrutiny (England) Regulations 2011. Mrs Nolan Barnes advised that one of the duties was to cooperate with others at risk management authorities and to share information. As part of this, Blackpool Council was part of the Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership, which reported on progress of the duties on a quarterly basis to the Environment Agency's Regional Flood and Coastal Committee.

It was explained to the Committee that the Flood Risk Management Strategy was approved in May 2014 and was a joint strategy with Lancashire County Council. Therefore some of the actions included within the Strategy would be undertaken by Lancashire County Council.

Members noted the RAG performance table included within the report and raised questions with regards to the progress on the actions rated as being red. Mrs Nolan Barnes advised that some of the actions were due to be removed from the Action Plan as

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they were no longer achievable. With regards to the action to 'Embed climate change into local flood risk management', the Committee was advised that the Service did not currently have appropriate knowledge to determine the extent to which climate change would have an impact in Blackpool. However, Mrs Nolan Barnes provided details of plans to make use of University resources to investigate the issue further.

Mrs Nolan Barnes reported that in relation to the action to 'Develop a Funding Strategy', completion of the action was dependant on central government changes and that the Environment Agency Flood Defence Grant in Aid process had changed to a six year determination.

In regards to the Medium Term Action Plan, Mrs Nolan Barnes advised that a number of the actions were rated as being red as a result of either resourcing issues, or alternatively, that some actions were being undertaken with Lancashire County Council, so the completion of those actions were dependant on Lancashire County Council also completing the action.

Members raised questions with regards to relationships with other authorities and whether any opportunities to exploit the Service's knowledge and expertise further could be made. Mrs Nolan Barnes advised that the Service was fully recompensed for the work that it completed in terms of joint working and provided an example of the fee received for being the Project Manager on the Anchorsholme Sea Defence work. Mrs Barnes considered that there was a very good working relationship in place with the Environment Agency, despite the Environment Agency's recent negative publicity.

The Committee raised questions in relation to the Surface Water Management Plan and Mrs Nolan Barnes advised that work was required to improve the relationship with external developers in order to improve sustainability of drainage systems in new developments.

Background papers: None.

## **9 BATHING WATER MANAGEMENT**

The Committee was presented with a report that detailed the performance in respect of the Council's statutory and other responsibilities in relation to Bathing Water Management.

Mrs Nolan Barnes explained the background to the recent legislative changes in the Revised Bathing Water Directive, which set out the statutory duties in respect of Blackpool's four bathing waters that were noted as being Blackpool South, Blackpool Central, Blackpool North and Bispham.

Members were advised that in 2011, it was predicted that once the Revised Bathing Water Directive came into force in 2015, seven of the eight bathing waters along the Fylde Peninsula would be rated as 'poor', which would have resulted in having to erect signage that advised against bathing. However, as a result of the work and actions

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undertaken to improve the quality of bathing waters, seven out of the eight bathing waters along the Fylde coast had passed the quality standards at the end of the 2015 bathing season. It was reported that in respect of Blackpool's four bathing waters Blackpool South had been rated as excellent, Blackpool North had been rated as good and Blackpool Central and Bispham were sufficient. As a result, Mrs Nolan Barnes advised that for the first time in Blackpool's history, an application had been made for the prestigious Blue Flag award for Blackpool South and seaside awards for Blackpool Central, North and Bispham.

The Committee raised questions regarding the discounting of sampling for testing purposes. In response, Mrs Nolan Barnes advised that short term pollution signage could be provided at bathing waters at times when rainfall was expected to be heavy. The advantage was that the public received additional advice about bathing water quality and the results could subsequently be discounted for the period that the short term pollution advice was provided. However, Mrs Nolan Barnes advised that the 2015 results did not take into account any discounted data from short term pollution events.

The Committee was advised that the ability to challenge the results by applying step change as a result of the United Utilities investment had impacted positively on the overall results. Mrs Nolan Barnes explained further that the testing period was over a four year period and since the start of that period, United Utilities had undertaken extensive work to improve the quality of bathing water, which had subsequently been reflected in the 2015 results.

The Committee discussed the sampling of bathing water and raised questions regarding the sources of bathing water pollution. Mr Blackledge advised that it was difficult to accurately apportion source pollution statistics, unless a DNA profiling of the samples was undertaken by the Environment Agency. It was explained that such a profiling had been conducted in 2012, so it was possible to draw some assumptions regarding source pollution, but more up to date profiling would be welcomed to indicate where further improvements could be made.

The Committee agreed to request a report detailing performance against the Action Plan and the bathing water quality results be presented to the Committee on an annual basis.

Background papers: None

## **10 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN**

Mr Kelly, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser, presented the Tourism, Resources and Economy Scrutiny Committee Workplan for the remainder of the Municipal Year. It was noted that it was a flexible, working document. Members could submit items for consideration by the Committee at any time through the Chairman.

The Committee noted that the Monitoring Committee Recommendations table had been included that enabled Members to monitor how their recommendations had been implemented.

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The Chairman also advised that the Audit Committee had recommended the Tourism, Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee consider a report on the impact and performance of the CCTV Service, once its performance was able to be demonstrated.

The Committee agreed:

- 1) To approve the Workplan
- 2) To note the Monitoring Committee Recommendations table.
- 3) To approve the recommended item for consideration from the Audit Committee to receive a report on the impact and performance of the CCTV Service.

Background papers: None.

**11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Committee agreed to note the date of the next meeting as Thursday, 19 May 2016, at 6.00 p.m, subject to approval at Annual Council.

**Chairman**

(The meeting ended at 7.50 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:  
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