

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 8 JANUARY 2020**

Present:

Councillor Mitchell (in the Chair)

Councillors

Burdess

Farrell

Hobson

Walsh

G Coleman

Galley

Owen

Wilshaw

In Attendance:

Councillor Neal Brookes, Cabinet Member for Housing and Welfare Reform

Councillor Gillian Campbell, Deputy Leader (Place and Tourism)

Councillor Maria Kirkland, Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion and Leisure

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

John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services

Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration

Jez Evans, Head of Waste and Environmental Operations

John Paul Lovie, Waste Services Manager

Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications

John Greenbank, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser (Scrutiny)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF TOURISM ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 9 OCTOBER 2019

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the 9 October 2019 meeting of the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee represented a true and 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 its remit, taken since the last meeting of the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee on 9 October 2019.

Members queried Executive Decision Ex27/2019 'Development of a Soft Play Centre and Café Facility at Blackpool Sports Centre' and the decision to defer approval due to an

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increase in the lending rate of the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB). Councillor Maria Kirkland, Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion and Leisure, reported that the Council would be reviewing the business case for the development and monitoring the sport centre's usage. The review would also involve consultation with groups who frequently used the sports centre to determine what impact the development could have upon them.

The Committee also queried how the raise in PWLB lending rates could have affected the development. Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources, responded that the Council was not reliant on PWLB funding for the development and that other sources of funding were available. Members noted however that if the development of the café and soft play centre had gone ahead then the rate change would have impacted upon it.

The Financial Performance Monitoring as at Month 4 2019/2020 was noted by Members and the progress on the 2020/2021 Budget queried. Mr Thompson replied that the next monitoring report would be considered by the Executive at its January 2020 meeting, and would provide an update on the Council's financial position. He also explained that the provisional settlement for local government funding from central government had been as expected and that it was foreseen that a draft budget would be available for consultation before the end of January 2020.

Members discussed the Officer Non-Key Decision regarding the Purchase of the Houndshill Shopping Centre and the communication associated with it. The Committee expressed concern that the reason for the purchase had not been communicated well enough and the benefits were not clear to the public. Councillor Gillian Campbell, Deputy Leader (Place and Tourism), responded that the timing of the announcement had been complicated by the pre-election period in the run up to the General Election in December 2019 and that the benefits could have been explained better. Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communication and Regeneration, also stated that the purchase had been justified by the business case and would allow the Council greater control over the development of the town centre. He added that Council-ownership of the shopping centre meant that the town centre was now owned by partners who had a common vision for its future and would allow better links with the development of the central leisure quarter. Mr Cavill also reported that discussions for the extension of the shopping centre were ongoing and a potential operator of a proposed cinema had been identified.

The Committee further questioned if the £47m spent on the purchase of the shopping centre represented value for money and if the amount paid had represented its market value. Mr Cavill responded that the amount paid by the Council represented the rental value of the site, but noted that the value could vary dependent on the retail market. He added that it was predicted that the shopping centre would generate a 10% return for the Council and that an application to the Future High Street Fund had been made for additional funding to invest in the site.

The speed of the purchase was also questioned by Members. Mr Cavill replied that the purchase had followed the foreclosure of a loan taken out the shopping centre previous owners by their bank. The bank had subsequently sold the shopping centre to the Council. Purchase of the shopping centre had however been a long-term aim of the Council and discussions regarding a possible sale had been taking place since December 2017.

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Members also discussed Cabinet Member Decision PH58/2019 'Public Transport Hub Traffic Enforcement Cameras' and queried how the income from Penalty Charge Notices would be used and sought reassurance that adequate signage would be installed to warn members of the public of the changes. The Committee stressed that the enforcement should not be used as a form of income generation and that this could lead to a negative impact on visitors to Blackpool. Councillor Campbell responded that the aim of the installation of enforcement cameras was not to generate income but to prevent the use of a zone reserved for buses by private vehicles. She also confirmed that clear and adequate signage would be installed and it was planned that the first cameras would be live from 31 March 2020. Mr Cavill added that the cameras would initially be installed in an area already reserved for buses and therefore there would be no change to existing car routes around Blackpool. He added that the cameras would be operated by the Council and any income would be reinvested in traffic enforcement. Members asked if any assessment of improper use by private vehicles of the zone had been undertaken. Mr Cavill confirmed that it had and that the data could be provided to the Committee.

5 TOURISM PERFORMANCE UPDATE

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications, presented an update on Tourism Performance during 2018 and 2019. He reported that the data showed that performance during 2019 had been mixed following a positive 2018. High points in visitor numbers had been noted over Easter, the August Bank Holiday weekend and the October Half-Term during 2019. However long periods of poor weather and a general lack of consumer confidence had resulted in mixed trading in Blackpool in line with other tourism destinations in the UK.

The Committee queried if any data was available regarding international visitors to Blackpool and if any work had been undertaken to attract visitors from abroad. Mr Welsh responded that the majority of visitors to Blackpool had come from the UK but that some international events, such as the World Ballroom Championship, had attracted thousands of overseas visitors. Work had been undertaken to improve links with Manchester Airport in conjunction with Visit England to encourage more visitors to include Blackpool on their itineraries. The growing number of Chinese visitors to the UK had also been identified as a market that Blackpool could benefit from.

Members also discussed the value of Visit Blackpool to the resort and its impact. It was queried what measurable benefits it brought to Blackpool, in response to which Mr Welsh explained that while it was difficult to determine what would happen if Visit Blackpool did not exist it had achieved a great deal in terms of raising the profile of the resort and increasing the value of the tourism economy. He also explained that the majority of its budget was spent on events and destination marketing, and that the Council was able to analyse the impact of events to show their value to the resort as demonstrated with the analysis of the 2019 Lightpool Festival.

6 ENGAGEMENT OF EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS ANNUAL REPORT

Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources, presented a report detailing the consultancy spend across Council services in 2018/2019. He reported that the total spend for the year

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had been £2.6m, a breakdown of which had been provided to Members as part of the report.

The Committee queried the use of an architect as part of the Museum Project considering that these services had previously existed in-house as part of a capital projects team. Mr Thompson replied that work requiring an architect by the Council was irregular and did not therefore justify the costs of employing one. He also noted that some project funding was conditional on the use of external consultants. It was further asked if an increase in capital projects would create a need for the re-establishment of an in-house service going forward. Mr Thompson responded that the Council was looking at its capital projects going forward and any changes would be in response to an established need.

A payment of £334,917 was noted in relation to professional fees for a dispute involving the tramway extension was queried by Members. Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration, responded that the dispute related to the tramway on the promenade and had been resolved.

Members also queried the payment of £20,000 to an external consultant for fundraising services. Mr Thompson replied that the role of the external consultant had been to generate £670,000 for the Blackpool Museum project.

The Committee also asked for an update on the progress on legal action in relation to the corrective work required for the Starr Gate Tram depot. Mr Cavill responded that a court date had been set for resolution of the dispute and that the Council would be seeking compensation from the depot's developer.

7 INVESTMENTS OUTSIDE OF THE BOROUGH

Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources, presented a report on Council Investments Outside of the Borough. It was reported that there were two such investments, Ribble House which had been let for office accommodation in Lytham and the Tramshed, student accommodation in Preston. Both these investments were shown to have generated a financial return for the Council.

The Committee queried why investments had been made outside of Blackpool and what the benefit to the town would be. Mr Thompson replied that the investments had been made in line with the Capital Strategy. The strategy determined that investments should only be made if they contributed to economic growth or could generate a financial return for Blackpool. He added that by investing in Lancashire the Council ensured that business rates generated by the investments would be included in the pan-Lancashire business rate pooling arrangement so some of the rates would return to Blackpool.

Members also asked if any plans existed for further investments outside of the borough. Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communication and Regeneration, responded that no plans currently existed for further investments but that the Council remained open to opportunities that could arise. He also noted that investments would have to link to Blackpool and be of benefit to the town. For example the Tramshed had a discount available to help students from Blackpool with accommodation costs.

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The Committee welcomed the report and asked if more could be done to advertise the benefits of the investments to the wider public.

8 WASTE SERVICE AND STREET CLEANSING PERFORMANCE REPORT

Mr John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services, presented the Waste Services and Street Cleansing Performance Report. He informed the Committee that the report covered a wide range of services and that performance had been good against the challenges faced within Blackpool.

Members welcomed the report and praised the inclusion of information regarding the challenges faced by the service. It was felt that this information would help the Committee identify areas where scrutiny would be of value.

It was noted that the government had recently published its National Waste Strategy and that the Lancashire Waste Strategy was due for renewal in 2020. The Strategy was a joint document between the Council and Lancashire County Council. Mr Blackledge therefore asked if the Committee would wish to feed into the development of this piece of work, while noting that this could be a joint piece of work with Lancashire County Council. The Committee agreed that a dedicated session should be held to consider the draft Strategy.

Members of the Committee highlighted the ongoing issue of the use of plastic bin bags being used for kerbside domestic waste collections, and the damage that could be done by seagulls to them. This had created significant areas of untidiness within Blackpool and therefore it was asked if the new waste company, Enveco, which was wholly-owned by the Council, would introduce bins for all household waste. Mr John-Paul Lovie, Waste Services Manager, responded that the Council and Enveco were looking at a wide range of options to improve domestic waste collection, which included the provision of domestic waste bins. He added that a plan would be developed following consultation with ward Members to be rolled out by the end of February 2020. It was also noted that not all areas of Blackpool would be suitable for the introduction of domestic waste bins.

The Committee asked what had been done to encourage recycling by residents and if communications of the working being undertaken could be improved. Mr Lovie explained that more could be undertaken to improve communication but that significant work had taken place. This included involvement with the 'Keep Britain Tidy' campaign and information targeted at children and young people to get them to encourage their parents to recycle more. He also stated that no recycling from Blackpool went to landfill and where possible the Council sought to recycle locally, although it was noted that approximately 10% of plastic recycling was sent to a Spanish company to be recycled.

Members queried which areas of Blackpool had the highest level of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) issued for littering. Mr Jez Evans, Head of Waste and Environmental Operations, responded that most FPNs were issued in the high density areas in the centre of Blackpool, but that littering happened across the town. The Committee also asked how enforcement had taken place and if better coverage and more staff were needed. Mr Evans replied that enforcement training was available to all staff within the service, not just enforcement officers, including how to challenge an individual who had littered.

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It was also queried how enforcement of littering within parks was undertaken. Mr Evans informed the Committee that Parks had recently been added to his service and that all staff would be trained in how to challenge littering and report it to street cleansing. Consideration was also being given to using CCTV to assist in preventing littering. Mr Blackledge added that all staff were encouraged to not just walk past instance of littering and ensure that it was reported. Mr Evans also stated that residents were able to report littering via the Council website.

The Committee also discussed the use of FPNs and action taken for non-payment. Mr Evans stated that where sufficient evidence of an individual littering existed the Council would seek to prosecute them for non-payment of an FPN. Members also asked at what age someone could be issued with an FPN, noting that some of those who littered were of school age. Mr Evans responded that anyone over the age of 10 years old could be issued with a FPN. Where this was the case the Council sought to involve a child's parents in a solution that could involve them assisting with street cleaning in their area if they were unable to pay the FPN. It was also emphasised that the service relied on members of the public reporting instances of littering to help ensure Blackpool was kept clean and that the activity of the service had received support from residents.

Members also asked what concerns officers had for the future of waste service operations going forward. Mr Blackledge replied that there was a need to develop a new Lancashire Waste Strategy to replace the existing strategy which would come to an end in 2020. He also noted that the Council's landfill contract would end in 2025, and it was hoped that this would be an opportunity to end the use of landfill for waste disposal by Blackpool. However an alternative would need to be identified to achieve this ambition.

While the Committee welcomed the work undertaken to encourage residents to reduce littering it was queried what had been done with littering by visitors to Blackpool. In response Mr Evans stated that Sail Flags had been displayed on the promenade during the summer encouraging the use of bins and that the services vans had played a jingle to further encourage their use. Officers believed that this had had a positive impact on visitors to Blackpool.

The Committee agreed that a dedicated session be held to consider the draft Lancashire Waste Strategy.

9 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee noted the Scrutiny Workplan report and associated updates.

It was also noted that the Community Engagement Review Panel would be held on 30 January 2020. The Committee nominated the following Members to sit on the review panel;

- Councillor Paul Galley
- Councillor Gerard Walsh
- Councillor Paul Wilshaw

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10 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Committee was confirmed as Wednesday, 5 February 2020 at 6pm.

11 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Committee agreed that under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the items on 'Strategic Acquisitions in or adjoining the Enterprise Zone' and 'The Sale of Land in the North of Blackpool' on the Forward Plan on the grounds that they would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

12 FORWARD PLAN

(The press and public were excluded prior to the consideration of this item as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act).

The Committee considered the contents of the Council's Forward Plan January 2020 to April 2020, relating to the portfolios of Cabinet Members whose responsibilities fell within its remit.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.45 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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