

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 5 FEBRUARY 2020**

Present:

Councillor Mitchell (in the Chair)

Councillors

Burdess	Galley	Owen	Walsh
G Coleman	Matthews	R Scott	

In Attendance:

Councillor Neal Brookes, Cabinet Member for Housing and Welfare Reform
Councillor Fred Jackson, Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport and Climate Change
Councillor Maria Kirkland, Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion and Leisure
Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Job Creation

Councillor Mrs Maxine Callow JP, Chair of the Scrutiny Leadership Board

Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration
Steve Thompson, Director of Resources
Clare Nolan Barnes, Head of Coastal and Environmental Partnership Investments
Scott Butterfield, Strategy, Policy and Research Manager
Andrew Duckett, Service Manager Energy and Sustainability
John Paul Lovie, Waste Services Manager

John Greenbank, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser (Scrutiny)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 8 JANUARY 2020

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the 8 January 2020 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.

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4 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Executive and Cabinet Member decisions taken, within its remit, since the last meeting of the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee on 8 January 2020.

Members queried Executive Decision EX3/2020 'Council Homes Investment Plan 2020-2025' whereby it was agreed that the Council would purchase up to fifty homes at market value to meet local need in partnership with Blackpool Coastal Housing (BCH). It was noted that the Council had a wholly-owned company, Blackpool Housing Company (BHC), whose role was to purchase and develop property to improve its quality. Therefore it was asked if the Council purchasing houses for BCH would conflict with the role of BHC under the plan.

Councillor Neal Brookes, Cabinet Member for Housing and Welfare Reform, responded that a conflict between the operations of the Council's two housing companies was not foreseen. He stated that BHC had worked to address the issue of low-quality houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs) and improve them to help develop communities. The purpose of the investment plan however was to purchase single houses, including ones formerly part of Council housing stock but purchased by their occupants under the right to buy scheme, to add to the stock managed by BCH. The nature of these houses was described as different to the HMOs purchased by BHC, as the Council would be looking for homes with multiple bedrooms but few occupants. Although no properties had yet been identified for purchase, Councillor Brookes informed the Committee that the initial focus would be on former right to buy properties that had fallen into a state of disrepair.

The Committee further queried the funding for the investment plan and how many homes were planned to be purchased. Councillor Brookes replied that the Council could borrow up to £60m, approximately half the value of BCH's housing stock, to support the plan. He added that it was planned that two-hundred and fifty homes would be bought under the plan by 2025.

Members also queried if the plan would have an impact on the housing development at Foxhall Village. Councillor Brookes responded that the development was not connected to the investment plan.

The Committee queried if under EX4/2020 'Madame Tussauds Attraction Business Development' the Council would carry all the risk of a loan to the attraction and if so why was this the case. Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration, explained that unlike other sites in Blackpool where an attractions operator would rent Council property as a tenant, Madame Tussauds was operated as a Council asset by Merlin on the authority's behalf. Therefore the Council and Merlin both shared the profits generated by the attraction. Mr Cavill further explained that under the agreement with Merlin, the repayment of the loan would result in a reduced profit share for them while the loan was outstanding.

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It would therefore be in Merlin's best interest to pay off the loan in a timely manner.

5 FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT

Ms Clare Nolan-Barnes, Head of Coastal and Environmental Partnership Investments, presented the Flood Risk Management Annual Report, which highlighted the work to manage flood risk in Blackpool during 2019-2020.

The Committee was informed that the Council continued to fulfil its statutory duties but that significant challenges remained to build resilience and maintain flood defences. In order to address these challenges the Council had worked to establish Flood Forums in Anchorsholme-Norbreck and Ingthorpe-Greenlands, both areas affected by flooding. The forums would allow local people to discuss flooding issues within their communities. It was also hoped that the forums would provide a community led approach to improving flood defences, which would then be supported by the Council. The Committee also noted that the Council had received £110k of funding from United Utilities and the Environment Agency, to carry out a study, to better understand the mechanisms of flooding and to identify potential solutions to mitigate future flood events. The Committee welcomed the establishment of the new flood forums and asked that details of work undertaken by them and other projects in flood affected areas be included in the next Flood Risk Management Annual Report, scheduled for early 2021.

Members queried what dedicated resources the Council had to address flood risk. In response Ms Nolan-Barnes stated that she was the lead officer for flood risk but other officers had been identified to undertake flood risk management work as part of their roles to ensure that the Council had a flexible work force when managing flood risk.

Ms Nolan-Barnes also presented the draft Lancashire Flood Risk Strategy to the Committee. Members were informed that Blackburn with Darwen Council would also be contributing and adopting the new strategy, along with Lancashire County Council and Blackpool. This had not previously been the case and represented a wider area than under the previous strategy. The Committee queried if other organisations such as United Utilities and Highways England had contributed to the development of the strategy. In response Ms Nolan-Barnes stated that United Utilities and the Environment Agency had been involved in the development of the strategy and work had been undertaken to engage other services. The Committee therefore asked that an update on the work to engage agencies, such as Highways England, be included in the 2021 Flood Risk Management Annual Report.

The Committee also queried if the Council's planning policy could be used to help manage flood risk. It was noted that the Council had lost a number of appeals to the planning inspector, where refusals had been in part due to flood risk concerns, because United Utilities had not raised objections to them. Ms Nolan-Barnes responded that the Council worked with developers to ensure flooding concerns were taken into account. Strategic Planners and Development Control also included requirements for developers to show how flooding would be mitigated on future developments.

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She also added that United Utilities had agreed to take on responsibility, where it met their requirements, for the connections from new developments via their sewers adoption policy for the maintenance of sustainable drainage systems (SUDS), something they had not previously done. It was noted that this was a significant change in flood risk management.

Members also queried which agency had responsibility for watercourses in Blackpool. Ms Nolan-Barnes responded that the Environment Agency had responsibility for Bispham Dyke as it was a main river. Responsibility for other watercourses remained with either the Council or the owner of the land on which they cross.

The Committee agreed that work with agencies such as Highways England and details of the new flood forums be included in the 2021 Flood Risk Management Annual Report.

6 BATHING WATER MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT

Ms Clare Nolan-Barnes, Head of Coastal and Environmental Partnership Investments, presented the Bathing Water Management Annual Report. She outlined that the Council was continuing to comply with its statutory responsibilities and work with partners through the Turning Tides and LoveMyBeach campaigns to improve water quality, promote health usage and encourage tourism.

Issues regarding pollution by birds existed and work had been undertaken to identify which birds in particular were responsible. The Council was working with the Keep Britain Tidy campaign to look at methods of safely moving birds from areas of the town where they could cause a nuisance.

The Committee queried what funding was available from central government for bathing water quality. Ms Nolan-Barnes responded that no funding had been available since 2017. Members noted that this presented a serious challenge to maintaining water quality in Blackpool. It was therefore agreed that the Chair should write to the Members of Parliament for Blackpool North and Blackpool South, on the Committee's behalf, to ask if any funding was available from central government.

The release by United Utilities of overflow from drains into the sea during storm events was queried by the Committee. Members asked if any data was available on how many times release had been made during the last year. Ms Nolan-Barnes responded that she would contact United Utilities to determine such information was available.

Councillor Fred Jackson, Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport and Climate Change, updated the Committee on the work of the Fylde Peninsula Water Management Partnership. The Partnership had worked with hoteliers to encourage the use proper use of sewage facilities by guests, however it was noted that engagement had reduced following some initial enthusiasm. Councillor Jackson also emphasised that greater education was needed on how to maintain water quality.

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Members also noted the limited resources available and the work undertaken by Ms Nolan-Barnes and congratulated her on what had been achieved.

The Committee agreed:

1. That the Chair write to local MPs to query funding available from central government for the improvement of bathing water quality; and
2. To receive a response from United Utilities, through Clare Nolan-Barnes, on the number of times overflow from drains had been released into the sea in 2019/2020.

7 SINGLE-USE PLASTICS UPDATE

Mr John-Paul Lovie, Waste Services Manager, presented an update on the progress to implement the Council's Single-Use Plastics (SUP) Policy. He informed Members that the policy had been formally adopted by the Council and all of its wholly-owned companies. A Communications Plan had also been developed and published in January 2020, which could be made available to Members of the Committee.

The initial focus of implementing the policy had been within the Council to improve its policies and procedures to reduce SUP usage where possible. It was foreseen that once this had been successfully embedded then more work could be undertaken with local businesses to raise awareness and encourage the reduction of SUPs in Blackpool.

Members queried if the Council would be SUP free by May 2020, as outlined in a Council Motion from 27 June 2018. Mr Lovie responded that the target had been ambitious and that although it was unlikely that the Council would be SUP free by that date, lots had been achieved to reduce their usage across services. The Committee was also informed that this had included changes to the Council's procurement guidelines so that where practicably possible alternatives to SUPs would be sought.

The Committee also asked how the Council was engaging the wider public in addressing the issue of SUPs in Blackpool. Mr Lovie responded that as well as reducing the SUPs in its own supply chains, and those of its wholly-owned companies, the Council also worked to raise awareness amongst its own staff and encourage changes in their behaviour. Further to this Mr Lovie also informed the Committee that the Council and its waste company, Envenco, would be working with schools to promote behavioural change aimed at reducing SUP waste. A launch event with ten local schools had been organised in relation to this, with a focus on the importance of a clean environment to a seaside resort.

8 CLIMATE EMERGENCY UPDATE

Mr Scott Butterfield, Strategy, Policy and Research Manager and Mr Andrew Duckett, Service Manager Energy and Sustainability, presented a report on the work undertaken in response to the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency.

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Mr Butterfield informed Members that the declaration had set out various ambitions for Blackpool including being net-zero carbon and achieving 100% clean energy across Council services by 2030. In response, the Council had identified four major themes to achieve the declaration;

- Emissions Reduction
- Town Engagement
- Culture Change
- Wider Influence

These themes were being used to develop an Action Plan, with consideration of climate emergency issues also being built into the Council's future strategies and policies.

Mr Duckett informed Members of the Committee that the Council had adopted a science based approach to determine how best to achieve the targets set out in the declaration. Action that would be undertaken included updating the sustainability strategy, reducing emissions generated by the Council, reducing waste, improving energy efficiency and moving to renewable energy systems.

The Committee queried if the targets outlined in the declaration were achievable. Mr Butterfield responded that work was underway to identify actions that needed to be undertaken to achieve the 2030 target. Part of this would include supporting a proposed young person assembly on climate change where views would be sought regarding what the priorities for Blackpool should be. Mr Butterfield undertook to provide the action plan to Members of the Committee once it had been finalised in consultation with senior officers. Officers would also be seeking to determine what funding streams were available to support achieving the targets outlined in the declaration. Councillor Fred Jackson, Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport and Climate Change, added that good progress had been achieved since the declaration had been made and that it was important to emphasise that everyone had a role to play in addressing climate change.

Members noted that the declaration had stated a Citizen's Assembly should have been held in 2019 to identify priorities for addressing climate change in Blackpool. As one had not taken place, it was queried why this was the case. Councillor Jackson responded that the Council had felt that the timing had not been right to hold an assembly in 2019. Mr Butterfield added that other events, such as the December 2019 General Election, would have prevented an assembly being held in 2019. He added that the approximate cost of an assembly, based on how other local authorities had organised similar events, would be a minimum of £35k and that it would be important for the Council to identify the actions it should undertake before holding an assembly. Therefore no timetable for holding a Citizens Assembly had been determined. Mr Butterfield stated that the conclusions of the proposed Young Person's Citizen's Assembly would represent a good starting point for consideration of the issues by the wider public.

It was noted that the Sustainability Strategy contained a reference to using shale gas as part of considerations to move to clean energy.

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The Committee therefore asked why gas was considered sustainable. Mr Duckett replied that the Council was not looking at using shale gas to address its future energy needs and that the reference had been included so that all options would be considered. Mr Butterfield stated that the strategy was approved in 2018 and would need updating to account for the Council's opposition to fracking.

Members asked what methods of energy generation the Council would likely use for its future energy needs, including options for wind power such as that used at the Solaris Centre. In response Mr Duckett stated that the urban nature of Blackpool and the lack of space made identifying sources of energy generation difficult but that the Council was looking at a variety of possibilities. He added that whatever scheme was chosen it would have to be commercially viable.

The Committee agreed that a copy of the Climate Emergency Action Plan be brought to the next meeting of the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee once it had been developed.

9 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee noted the Scrutiny Workplan report and associated updates.

It was also noted that the Adults Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee had agreed to undertake a review of Supported Housing in Blackpool. Due to the cross-cutting nature of the subject matter and the ongoing Housing and Homelessness Scrutiny Review by the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee, the following Members were nominated to take part in the review;

- Councillor Martin Mitchell
- Councillor Gerard Walsh
- Councillor Paul Galley

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Committee was confirmed as Wednesday, 22 April 2020 at 6.00pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.50 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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