

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 2020**

Present:

Councillor Mitchell (in the Chair)

Councillors

Burdess	Galley	Walsh
G Coleman	Hugo	Wilshaw

In Attendance:

Councillor Gillian Campbell, Cabinet Member for Tourism and Place
Councillor Jim Hobson, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment
Councillor Maria Kirkland, Cabinet Member of Community Cohesion and Leisure
Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member 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
Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications
John Greenbank, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser (Scrutiny)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest were made on this occasion.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 9 SEPTEMBER 2020

The Committee considered the minutes from the meeting held on 9 September 2020.

Councillor Gillian Campbell, Cabinet Member for Tourism and Culture, asked that the information provided regarding the Slimefest event under Minute 2 “Cabinet and Executive Decisions” be amended to clarify that although the event had been cancelled in 2020, it had been confirmed for 2022, 2023 and 2024.

Councillor Mrs Maxine Callow, Chair of Scrutiny Leadership Board also asked that the attendance list be amended to include her presence at the meeting.

Subject to the above amendments the Committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2020 be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

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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 taken, within its remit, since the last meeting of the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee on 9 September 2020.

In respect of Executive Decision EX42/2020 'Financial Performance Monitoring', Members asked if reassurance could be given that the Council would be able to pass a balanced budget and avoid triggering a Section 114 notice. It had been noted that the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown had led to such a notice being issued by the London Borough of Croydon. Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources, explained that 2020 had been an unprecedented year with a number of financial challenges related to the lockdown. In response to this the Council had decided to provide additional monitoring details to Members, starting from Month 2 rather than Month 3 as had been the case in previous years. He added that in Month 2 the Council had recorded a deficit of £19 million but as of Month 5 this had reduced to £12 million and it was expected that downward trend would continue as the financial year progressed.

Regarding EX41/2020 'The Blackpool Borough Council (King Street No 1) Compulsory Purchase Order 2020', the Committee asked if a tenant had been confirmed for the site. It was also queried if alternative plans existed in the event the site was not developed as office accommodation. Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Job Creation, responded that there was a process that needed to be undertaken to complete a compulsory purchase order on a property and that a tenant had yet to be confirmed. However he also stated that no work to develop the site as office accommodation would be undertaken until a tenancy agreement was in place, and that if this did not happen then other options could be explored for use of the site.

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the contents of the Council's Forward Plan December 2020 to April 2021, relating to the portfolios of the Cabinet Members whose responsibilities fell within its remit.

Members queried what, if any, Business Loan applications had been received and were under consideration. Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources, responded that none had been received over the lockdown period and only one application was outstanding at the time of the meeting.

In respect of the Flood Risk Strategy it was noted that the Committee would be holding a review panel meeting in January 2021 to consider the draft Flood Risk Strategy.

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Members asked that input from Highways be sought for inclusion in the strategy as part of consideration at this meeting.

The Committee also asked if in respect of the Capital Programme an analysis had been undertaken to determine what resources were required to ensure it was delivered. Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Regeneration and Communication, responded that the resources need to deliver the programme were kept under constant review. It was further noted that the Council would be recruiting a Housing and Capital Build Project Manager to help deliver a number of housing projects contained within the programme.

Councillor Jim Hobson left the meeting following this item.

6 PARKING SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications, presented the Parking Services Annual Report, which provided performance data for Council owned and managed car parks for the year 2019-2020. He explained that the nationwide lockdown had had a significant impact on parking within Blackpool, however there had been a significant recovery during the summer with the lifting of restrictions. This had been followed by another fall in patronage following Blackpool being placed into Tiers 2 and then 3 of coronavirus restrictions. It was also explained that the Council had launched a pay by phone function for paying for parking. Although the launch of this function had been delayed from March to May 2020 by the national lockdown, the application had been successfully launched and was Covid safe.

Members noted that in a normal year the Parking Service would generate a surplus from its income which could then be used to support other Council services. Therefore it was asked what impact not having this surplus would have on funding for Council services. Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources, explained that although budget setting was underway and a number of assumptions would have to be made, the budget confirmation had been moved back into March 2021 so that more time could be used to consider options. Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration, also noted that the Council was restricted on what it could use any parking surplus for, as legislation restricted it for use on infrastructure projects, such as highways.

The Committee also discussed improving the public perception of Parking Services. It was noted that many people did not understand the connection between paying for parking and how that money could be used to make improvements elsewhere. Councillor Paul Galley noted that he had seen a parking machine in the Lake District that had explained how money spent contributed to the local community, and suggested a similar approach could be taken in Blackpool. Mr Welsh replied that he was happy to look at any suggestions for service improvements, however he noted that the majority of car park users were tourists not local residents.

Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Job Creation, also reported that the Council had prepared a parking scheme for Christmas 2020. It was hoped that this would encourage an increase in usage over the Christmas period.

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7 TOURISM PERFORMANCE UPDATE

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communication, presented the Tourism Performance Update, which provided information on tourism performance in 2020 including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the visitor economy and the measures in place to aid its recovery.

Members noted the importance of coach trips to the tourist economy in Blackpool. The Covid-19 lockdown had resulted in a significant downturn in the number of trips being made to Blackpool and asked what work was being undertaken to restore confidence that the town was a safe place to visit. Mr Welsh replied that restoring consumer confidence was a key objective in the recovery work being undertaken. He added that hotel groups operating in Blackpool had also been worked with to develop marketing material that would encourage tourists to return when appropriate.

The Committee queried what plans were in place for Christmas 2020. Mr Welsh explained that plans were dependent on what Covid-19 restrictions were in place at the time but that businesses were ready to reopen and it was believed that Blackpool had a strong offer for attracting people to the town. It was also explained that a full events program had been planned from May 2021, following the cancellation of most of the 2020 events calendar.

Members also queried if any Council or Wholly Owned Company (WOC) staff were on zero-hours contracts and if so whether they had been furloughed under the national scheme to protect income. Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Regeneration and Communication, replied that to his knowledge no Council or staff employed directly by WOCs were on zero-hour contracts, however some agency staff and those hired for specific events could have been. He also noted that some staff at the Winter Gardens had been made redundant as a result of the impact of Covid-19. Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications, also added that businesses across Blackpool had worked hard to mitigate the impact of the lockdown on their workforce.

8 BLACKPOOL ILLUMINATIONS

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communication, provided a report on the operation of the Blackpool Illuminations, including sponsorship and future plans. Mr Welsh reported that it had been planned to extend the Illuminations season until 31 December 2020, however the introduction of a new national lockdown had meant that this had been paused and it was planned they would return if Covid-19 restrictions allowed. However they had initially been a success following a virtual switch on event.

Members asked how it was proposed that the £4m for the Illuminations bid from the Town Deal as outlined in the report be spent.

Mr Welsh explained that work was underway into the business case for money from the Town Deal, but would include details such as improving infrastructure, working with artists on new displays and ensuring a positive impact on the local economy.

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The Committee also queried how lights for the Illuminations were commissioned. Mr Welsh replied that lots of ideas were considered when designing lights for the Illuminations and that there was always scope for doing something different with the lights. An example of this had been the Moon installation in the Tower Ballroom in 2019. He added that the Council was also part of the 'Light Up The North' partnership which allowed the sharing of ideas and the costs of installations.

The development of a commercial arm to develop lights for other local authorities was also discussed. Mr Welsh noted that all the lights in the Illuminations were manufactured by the Council, and this expertise was being used to develop a commercial arm. He also reported that prior to the second Covid-19 lockdown, work had taken place with Crewe to develop lights for them over Christmas.

The Committee agreed that a dedicated review panel meeting would be held in 2021 to discuss in more detail the proposed business plan, the commissioning of lights and the operation of the illuminations commercial arm.

9 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee considered the Scrutiny Workplan report and update on work undertaken by the Active Lives Review Panel.

Members were also informed that it had been proposed that Single-Use Plastic (SUP) updates would be incorporated into the Committee's Climate Emergency update in the future. This was recommended as the SUP action plan had been included in the Climate Emergency body of work being undertaken. The Committee agreed to this change in the method of reporting on SUPs going forward.

The Committee agreed to note the contents of the Scrutiny Workplan, the work undertaken by the Active Lives Review Panel and the change to SUP reporting.

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Committee was confirmed as Wednesday, 3 February 2021 at 6.00pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.10 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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