

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 3 FEBRUARY 2021**

Present:

Councillor Mitchell (in the Chair)

Councillors

Burdess

Galley

Jackson

Walsh

G Coleman

Hugo

Owen

Wilshaw

In Attendance:

Councillor Neal Brookes, Cabinet Member of Housing and Welfare Reform

Councillor Jim Hobson, Cabinet Member of Climate Change and Environment

Councillor Maria Kirkland, Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion and Leisure

Councillor Mark Smith, Business, Enterprise and Job Creation

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

Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration

Scott Butterfield, Strategy, Projects and Research Manager

Andrew Duckett, Service Manager - Energy and Sustainability, Procurement and Project

John-Paul Lovie, Waste and Partnerships Manager

Claire Hazelgrove, Organising and Political Engagement Director, Futuregov (Item 6 only)

Thomas Kohut, Principle Consultant, Futuregov (Item 6 only)

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 18 NOVEMBER 2020

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2020 be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

3 PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Committee heard from Mr Ken Cridland on the subject of Public Rights of Way.

Mr Cridland informed the Committee that he had observed that some of the rights of way in Blackpool were blocked or in poor condition. He stated that in his opinion that this appeared to conflict with the Council's Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and its legal responsibility to maintain public rights of way in Blackpool.

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In order to address these issues Mr Cridland suggested that the Committee adopt a five-point plan which included the following; to seek to ensure that the Council could take on its full legal responsibilities for Rights of Way, to survey all the town's Public Rights of Way, to organise the maintenance of the paths that were already accessible, where they were inaccessible to find temporary diversions for six months and that during this period to carry out the work needed to re-open them.

He also suggested that the TEC Scrutiny Committee could seek regular reports on how the work on inaccessible pathways was progressing, and that annual reports regarding the accessibility and maintenance of Public Rights of Way be received.

The Committee thanked Mr Cridland for his attendance and the presentation that he had made and agreed to add the issue of Public Rights of Way to the Tourism Economy and Communities Work Programme. The Chairman also added that he hoped that Mr Cridland's attendance at the meeting would encourage other members of the public to speak at future meetings.

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 18 November 2020.

In respect of Cabinet Member Decision PH51/2020 "Blackpool Business Recovery Fund" Members asked if the fund would be used to support the coach industry in Blackpool. In response, Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Job Creation explained that the first round of funding allocation had been agreed and that the coach industry had not been included. However there would be a further round of funding where the inclusion of the coach industry could be looked into. He added that the terms of the fund had been agreed with the Government who had provided the grant to establish the fund and that under these terms there was a possibility that the money could not be used in this way. Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communication and Regeneration added that it could be difficult to provide support to some businesses due to the terms for eligibility for funding being determined by the Government, but added that support for the coach industry could be looked into.

A query was also raised regarding PH2/2021 "Sundry Debt, Council Tax, Housing Benefit Overpayments and Business Rates Write Offs". The Committee asked if a comparison of the proportionality of debts written off was available. Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources, replied that the schedule of write offs for the past five years could be provided to the Committee in writing following the meeting.

Regarding Executive Decision EX1/2020 "Proposed Rent Review 2021/2022" Members asked how much the proposed rent increase of 1.5% would generate in income and how much this would cost tenants. In response, Mr Thompson explained that there had been a 1% reduction year-on-year to 2019/2020, and that details on the impact of the rent increase in 2021/22 could be provided to Members following the meeting.

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Councillor Neal Brookes, Cabinet Member for Housing and Welfare Reform added that the decision had been made as the Council had agreed to base rents on the Consumer Price Index and the increase would support the Council's Housing Revenue Account. The lower earning tenants would receive financial support via Housing Benefit.

The Committee agreed to receive the schedule of write offs for the past five years following the meeting.

5 FORWARD PLAN

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

The Committee asked how many applications had been approved from the Business Loans Fund to date in 2020/2021. Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources, replied that from recollection there had been three such applications in 2020 of which one had so far been approved but he would confirm this following the meeting. Members asked if the low number received was the result of poor communications of the fund. In response, Mr Thompson explained that details of the fund and how to apply were available online.

In respect of the Layton Conservation Area, Members asked if any other areas in Blackpool were under consideration to be designated as Conservation Areas. Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communication and Regeneration, responded that a number of areas around Stanley Park were under consideration and that a breakdown of the areas could be provided to Members.

The Committee agreed:

1. To receive confirmation of the number of Business Loans Fund applications in 2020/2021 following the meeting.
2. To receive a breakdown of the areas under consideration for potential Conservation Areas.

6 CLIMATE EMERGENCY PROGRESS AND NEXT STEPS

The Committee considered an update on the key activities and steps for 2021 in taking the climate emergency forward as a Council and town to make Blackpool net-carbon neutral by 2030.

Ms Claire Hazelgrove, Organising and Political Engagement Director, Futuregov, and Mr Thomas Kohut, Principle Consultant, Futuregov, were welcomed to the meeting and provided an overview of the Climate Assembly and its planned next steps.

In order to determine the membership of the assembly, 8,000 residents had been contacted, from whom 300 had put themselves forward as potential representatives. Of those 40 had been selected to attend.

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These individuals had then been given assistance and training to ensure they could fully take part in the assembly process.

In parallel to the Climate Assembly a Youth Climate Assembly had been held to assist in capturing the views of young people in addressing the climate emergency in Blackpool. The youth assembly had focussed on energy, food, transport, green spaces and blue spaces.

Although the final recommendations of the Climate Assembly had yet to be confirmed the Committee was informed that the emerging issues included; making public transport and cycling the primary modes of transport in the town centre, exploring the potential of using Blackpool's natural resources to generate energy, making housing more energy efficient, network building to ensure a unified approach to achieving carbon neutrality and supporting people to develop local climate emergency related projects.

Mr Scott Butterfield, Strategy, Projects and Research Manager informed the Committee that the emerging recommendations were considered to be helpful and that a further report on the outcomes of the assembly would be provided to a future meeting.

The Committee asked how the membership of the assembly had been determined from the 300 individuals who had put themselves forward. Ms Hazelgrove replied that the aim of the selection had been to ensure that the assembly reflected Blackpool's population and demographics. Mr Butterfield added that they had also looked to include a wide selection of views on the Climate Emergency. He added that all those who had not been selected had been offered the opportunity to participate in a survey so that their views could be captured.

Members also noted that the assembly had used small "break-out" groups to discuss issues and asked if more details on these could be provided. Ms Hazelgrove answered that the use of smaller groups had been undertaken to allow everyone involved a chance to speak in a setting that was less intimidating than the full assembly and would facilitate discussion.

The Committee also asked how the representatives on the assembly had been supported, noting that some would not have had the same IT skills as others. In response, Ms Hazelgrove explained that where necessary devices had been provided and everyone involved had had the necessary training and support to ensure that they were comfortable with the technology being used.

Members welcomed the update and the information on the work of the Climate Assembly. It was considered however that more on the benefits to businesses and on how people were being engaged could be included. It was also stressed that ongoing work was needed to ensure that the Council was held to account for the commitment it had made in the climate emergency declaration and actions going forward should be bold and ambitious.

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The Committee also asked if any consideration had been given to ensuring air quality around schools and other education establishments. Mr Butterfield replied that air quality was a key issue and a pilot project was being developed in response to this, but Covid-19 had slowed progress. In addition, an Air Quality Strategy was being developed in relation to this issue. Ms Hazelgrove added that education was an important part of the assembly's work and consideration was being given to how schools could be helped to understand and reduce their carbon footprints.

An action in the report stated that the Council would "explore" the use of LEDs for street lighting, the Committee queried this inclusion noting that Blackpool's illuminations had used LEDs for a number of years and therefore the necessary knowledge should be available. Councillor Jim Hobson, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment replied that a meeting would be taking place to discuss this issue but that a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) was in place for street lighting in Blackpool. Mr Andrew Duckett, Service Manager - Energy and Sustainability, Procurement and Projects added that the PFI issue was complex but that a business case for using LEDs was being looked into and that an update on progress could be provided to a future meeting.

The commitment in the Blackpool Tree Strategy to plant 2,000 trees in the town was queried, with Members asking where they would be planted. Councillor Hobson responded that consideration was being given to the where this would take place.

The Committee agreed:

1. To receive a further report on the outcomes of the Climate Assembly to a future meeting.
2. That an update on progress regarding the PFI for street lighting in Blackpool and use of LEDs be provided to a future meeting.

7 WASTE SERVICES AND STREET CLEANSING PERFORMANCE REPORT

Mr John-Paul Lovie, Waste and Partnerships Manager presented the Waste Service and Street Cleansing Annual Report 2020. He informed the Committee that 2020 had been a difficult year for the service as a result of the impact of Covid-19. Issues experienced had included the temporary closure of the Household Waste Recycling Centre, although it was reported this had since been re-opened in a Covid-safe way.

Over the course of the year the service had sought to assist residents during lockdown and had supported the Council's CoronaKindness campaign. The service was also reported as delivering a transformation programme, including the transfer of services to the Council's new Wholly-Owned Company Envenco such as street cleansing. Work was also being undertaken with partner authorities across Lancashire to develop the Lancashire Waste Strategy, a draft of which was planned to be available for Spring 2021.

The Committee queried the in full (APSE) data that had been provided and asked if more explanation could be provided in the future regarding what the figures demonstrated.

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Mr Lovie replied that the APSE data represented benchmarking and comparisons with other authorities regarding Blackpool's performance, this information showed that the Council was performing well in all areas measured. However he recognised that more narrative information could be included in future reports as well as information on competitors.

Members also raised the issue of weed clearance and if greater engagement with community groups such as flood forums could be undertaken to help highlight problem areas. Mr Lovie recognised that more could be done in this regard but also noted that the service was utilising new technology to identify areas of weeds causing issues, such as blocking drainage, to allow them to be addressed.

Whether the service was ensuring it linked with the Climate Emergency work being undertaken across the Council was also queried. In response, Mr Lovie informed Members that the service was working to include Climate Emergency in its' work, including how to make waste collection more sustainable. He stated that a Strategic Environmental Risk Assessment Plan had been drafted and had included an assessment of how the service could make a difference, he also confirmed that he would share a copy of this document with the Committee for information.

Members also raised the issues of graffiti in the town centre and if a strategy was in place to address the problem and inquired if local businesses had been engaged to assist. In response, Mr Lovie explained that graffiti was an Environmental Enforcement issue and that the Council did its best to respond to any reports of graffiti as quickly as possible, although priority would be given to any that was considered obscene or offensive. He added that discussion would also be taking place with Enveco on how to address the problem.

The Committee agreed:

1. That future reporting contain additional narrative to explain the data presented.
2. To receive a copy of the Strategic Environmental Risk Assessment Plan following the meeting.

8 BATHING WATER QUALITY ANNUAL REPORT 2021

The Committee received the Bathing Water Quality Annual Report 2020 from Mr John-Paul Lovie, Waste and Partnerships Manager. The report outlined the work undertaken in the past year to deliver the Council's statutory duties in respect of bathing water management.

Mr Lovie informed the Committee that due to the restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Environment Agency had been unable to undertake sampling of bathing water during 2020, therefore it had been decided to roll-over the classifications from 2019. It was hoped that as restrictions eased that sampling could resume and an up-to-date classification could be awarded.

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It was also reported that a new algorithm had been implemented to allow for more accurate Pollution Risk Forecasting. Members asked if the new algorithm allowed for excess rain which could cause pollution from outside of Blackpool to wash into the town's water courses. Mr Lovie replied that this would be taken into account by the new algorithm, and that it had been designed to better measure such factors.

9 HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS REVIEW PANEL FINAL REPORT

The Committee considered the Housing and Homelessness Scrutiny Review Final Report.

In response to the recommendations outlined in the report Councillor Neal Brookes, Cabinet Member for Housing and Welfare Reform, asked that the following comments be noted;

Councillor Brookes noted that Recommendation 1 was connected to Recommendation 9 and stated that with respect of performance Key Performance Indicators were produced on a quarterly basis and suggested going forward that the proposed annual report be received after 31 March each year to allow the collection a full year's performance data.

With regards to Recommendation 2, Councillor Brookes agreed on the importance of the Blackpool Homeless Partnership. He also informed the Committee that the Partnership had met recently and had commissioned a plan of all the related homelessness meetings and whether these could be rationalised going forward.

Recommendation 5 was also highlighted, with Councillor Brookes informing the Committee that the Council was working with Blackpool Fulfilling Lives to look at how the Alternative Giving Scheme could be better promoted and that funding had been identified to support this.

Councillor Brookes noted that in respect of Recommendation 6 that the Council was in effect operating its Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) full-time due to the need to house people sleeping rough during the Covid-19 lockdown. It was also noted that government funding had been received up until March 2021 to support this, and that provision of the SWEP beyond this would be taken into consideration.

Regarding Recommendation 9, Councillor Brookes stated that he was not aware of a specific mystery shopper scheme that existed and he was therefore unsure how this could be implemented if approved.

Councillor Brookes also asked that Members noted in respect of Recommendation 10 that although the Council would look to secure additional funding to support homeless work, many government funding opportunities concerned the building of extra hostel accommodation. This was stated as not being in line with the approach the Council wished to take to address homelessness and therefore it should be recognised that not all offers of funding would be taken up.

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The Committee thanked Councillor Brookes for his comments and agreed to approve the Housing and Homelessness Scrutiny Review's Final Report for submission to the Executive in March 2021.

10 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee considered the Scrutiny Workplan report and update on work undertaken by the Community Safety Partnership Review Panel.

Members also received draft scoping documents for the planned reviews of the Blackpool Illuminations and Arts and Culture. In respect of the Arts and Culture Scoping document the Committee asked that the opportunity for wider public engagement be included in the scope.

The Committee also considered a referral from the Council's Audit Committee to consider undertaking a scrutiny review of CCTV infrastructure in Blackpool. Members recognised the importance of this work and agreed to accept the referral and add this item to the Committee's Workplan.

The Committee agreed to note its Workplan, the review scoping documents and the outcomes of the Community Safety Partnership Review Panel.

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Committee was confirmed as Wednesday, 14 April 2021 at 6.00pm

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.57 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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