

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>TOURISM ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
<b>Relevant Officer:</b>	Mr John Greenbank, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser (Scrutiny)
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	16 June 2021

## SCRUTINY REVIEW OF ILLUMINATIONS

### 1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To update on the work undertaken by scrutiny members on the review of The Blackpool Illuminations.

### 2.0 Recommendation(s):

2.1 To consider the update , the recommendations made and identify any further work to be undertaken on the Illuminations.

2.2 The a report updating the Review Panel on the following item be provided to the Committee at its December 2021 meeting:

- 2.3
- Details on the local community engagement work, including with young people and those with disabilities;
  - Emerging commercial opportunities, including heritage tours and paid for events;
  - None traditional light events (such as the Moon exhibition at the Winter Gardens);
  - The environmental improvements that had been made or were planned;
  - Details of how Town Deal money would be spent locally to improve education and skills;
  - The cost effectiveness of a “switch-on” event, in light of the extended Illuminations period;
  - Work to address the negative perception of Blackpool town centre at night; and
  - The progress on the Town Deal bid.

### 3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 To ensure the Committee has an overview of ongoing work.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

**4.0** Other alternative options to be considered:

4.1 None.

**5.0 Council priority:**

5.1 The relevant Council priority is

- Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience.

**6.0 Background information**

6.1 On 27 April 2021, Members of the Tourism, Economy and Communities (TEC) Scrutiny Committee held a Review Panel meeting to consider the delivery and future of the Illuminations in Blackpool

6.2 Councillor Martin Mitchell chaired the meeting with the following Members in attendance:

6.3	Councillor Paula Burdess	Councillor Paul Wilshaw
	Councillor Jane Hugo	Councillor Gerard Walsh
	Councillor Paul Galley	

6.4 Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Communications and Tourism and Mr Richard Williams, Illuminations Manager, were also in attendance.

6.5 The Review Panel had been agreed following the November 2020 meeting of the TEC Scrutiny Committee which had considered a report on the delivery of the Illuminations in 2021 and future plans for the event.

6.6 The Committee had noted that the Illuminations had sought £4.5m in funding from the Blackpool Town Deal and that a business case was being developed. The Review Panel was informed by officers that the money would be for capital investment which would be spent over a five-year period, for the development of new lights and attractions that would benefit the promenade and town centre.

6.7 The extended opening of the lights during 2020, in response to the Covid-19 lockdown, had demonstrated that there was a demand for the retro experience offered by the Illuminations. Therefore as part of the business case development officers had sought to consider how such an appeal could be sustained and expanded beyond a drive-through only experience.

- 6.8 Proposals had also been put forward as part of the Town Deal bid to make the extension of the Illuminations event from the autumn to the year end permanent. This had received support from other attractions in Blackpool, which had also sought to extend their opening times. Mr Welsh explained that these efforts were part of a wider plan by the Council to develop a year-round tourism offer, rather than limiting attractions to isolated periods of the year. The extended season would allow the Illuminations to link with the town's Christmas and new year offer. By repeating the extended season in 2021 officers could gain evidence that this approach was effective going forward.
- 6.9 The Council was also a member of the 'Light Up the North' group of local councils operating light shows. This group allowed for the sharing of ideas and the sharing of resources. There also existed the potential for using the group to jointly purchase services and equipment, allowing for reduced costs.
- 6.10 The Review Panel raised the issue of community engagement at the meeting. It had been noted by Members that engagement and enthusiasm for the Illuminations often came from outside of Blackpool and not local residents. Mr Williams responded that work had taken place to work with local artists with disabilities in designing parts of the attraction, however he agreed that wider engagement work was necessary. The Review Panel therefore asked if more could be done to engage local people, in particular young people.
- 6.11 The Mr Welsh also informed the Review Panel that although the Town Deal Business Case would be submitted in June 2021, it was unlikely that any funding would be received in 2021. Therefore the design and building of lights for 2021 would take place without this support. The Review Panel raised the possibility that once received the Town Deal money could be largely spent in the short-term to support tourism recovery post-Covid-19. Mr Welsh responded that spending in this way could result in the Council investing in technology that would become inadequate in the longer term. Therefore in order to ensure flexibility it was proposed that any money received would be spent evenly across the five year period of funding. Mr Williams added that this flexibility could be of benefit to the wider Council as new lighting technology, such as modular lights could be used across the Council services.
- 6.12 Members also discussed what commercial opportunities were available to generate additional income for the lights. The possibility of a pay-only section of the lights was raised, however Mr Welsh explained that there were a number of legal issues that could prevent this. For example, closing a section of a public road and restricting access to paying visitors would require a local referendum, which was considered unnecessarily onerous to undertake. Sponsorship of the lights was also raised as a possibility, with Mr Welsh explaining that a large international sponsor was difficult to

attract and would demand various rights, such as naming and exclusivity of product sales in return. Instead the Council sought to attract a greater number of sponsors for the Illuminations through demonstrating the growth and success of the attraction year on year.

- 6.13 The use of tableaux and well known characters in the light displays was also discussed, with it being noted that some famous characters required image rights to be bought. Consideration in these cases had to be given to the cost-effective nature of paying for the rights to a particular character. The Review Panel therefore asked that the greater commercial opportunities be explored by the Council to identify additional revenue streams to support the Illuminations.
- 6.14 The potential for offering the Council's Illuminations services to other Council in order to generate income was raised by the Review Panel. Mr Williams explained that the Council was registered on the Chest tendering service and that there had been expressions of interest. As part of this Blackpool was assisting Crewe deliver a light festival. However he noted that Blackpool needed to protect the unique offer it had, which could be diluted if too much focus was given to developing potential competitor attractions.
- 6.15 The environmental impact of the Illuminations was raised, with Members of the Panel asking what had been done or what was planned to address this issue. Mr Welsh explained that new manufacturing technology had been used to make the lights, which was cleaner and more energy efficient than that used previously. Reducing traffic through a greater number of walk through light attractions would also have positive environmental benefits. Mr Williams also noted that the use of LED lights made the Illuminations more energy efficient and that officers had investigated how the 'Light Up the North' Group could be used to secure more environmentally friendly systems, such as generators, for the future. Members of the Review Panel asked that more information on the work and future plans be provided.
- 6.16 The cost of holding a "Switch-On" event was queried, in light of the extended Illuminations seasons. It was suggested that with the lights on longer that the need for a special opening event was reduced. Mr Welsh responded that the event promoted the lights and that the Illuminations were open. He added that they also had a positive impact on local businesses in Blackpool. However he noted that consideration on how the event was delivered would be undertaken going forward, in light of the changes to the Illuminations.
- 6.17 The use of heritage assets that could be utilised as a commercial opportunity was discussed. Members noted that Blackpool Transport Company Ltd (BTS), operated a number of themed trams, and that the Council should look to work with the company to promote the attraction as part of the Illuminations. It also noted that BTS had undertaken crowd funding to support its heritage trams. Mr Welsh replied that the

Council would look to work with BTS to further the use of its trams during the Illuminations and its heritage programmes. In addition to this Mr Williams informed the Panel that behind the scenes heritage tours of the Illuminations works had taken place for schools and there was scope to develop this into a paid for attraction for a wider audience.

6.18 An ongoing challenge for encouraging visitors to leave their cars and enter Blackpool town centre at night was recognised. Members highlighted that the town centre had a negative reputation due to incorrect perceptions of crime in the areas among visitors. This could hamper efforts to stage walk through attractions in the town centre going forward. It was recognised that this issue would be difficult to address and the Panel asked that consideration be given to the issue going forward.

6.19 The Review Panel agreed to recommend that an update on the Illuminations be provide to the December 2021 meeting of the TEC Scrutiny Committee. In this report Members asked that the following information be provided:

- Details on the local community engagement work, including with young people and those with disabilities;
- Emerging commercial opportunities, including heritage tours and paid for events;
- None traditional light events (such as the Moon exhibition at the Winter Gardens);
- The environmental improvements that had been made or were planned;
- Details of how Town Deal money would be spent locally to improve education and skills;
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- The progress on the Town Deal bid.

6.20 Following receipt of this report it was agreed that further meeting of the Review Panel be held to consider potential recommendations.

6.21 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

**7.0 List of Appendices:**

7.1 None.

**7.2 Financial considerations:**

7.3 Details of discussions regarding Town Deal funding and the generation of additional income

are contained at 6.11 and 6.12 of the report.

**8.0 Legal considerations:**

8.1 None.

**9.0 Risk management considerations:**

9.1 None.

**10.0 Equalities considerations:**

10.1 The review panel identified a need to engage with young people and those with disabilities going forward as part of its discussions.

**11.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:**

11.1 Details of discussions regarding the environmental impact of the Illuminations are contained at 6.15 of the report.

**12.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:**

12.1 None.

**13.0 Background papers:**

13.1 Blackpool Illuminations Report – 18 November 2020

Minutes of TEC – 18 November 2020