

# Scrutiny Annual Report 2020/2021

Blackpool Council



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## Response to the pandemic

The impact of Covid-19 was keenly felt on scrutiny work and in March 2020 all ongoing work was temporarily suspended in light of the necessary restrictions put in place.

As an immediate response, the work of scrutiny was consolidated into the Scrutiny Leadership Board which held two special meetings in July 2020 to consider key service provision such as Adult Services, Public Health, Homelessness and the response of the Council to the pandemic.

Each of the three scrutiny committees also met informally in June 2020 to consider their workplans for the 2020/2021 Municipal Year to ensure that topics were prioritised and scheduled accordingly in light of the pandemic. It was agreed that the workplans would commence from September 2020 when the calendar of scrutiny meetings would recommence virtually and arrangements would be put in place to restart outstanding scrutiny reviews and policy development work.

## Scrutiny Leadership Board

The Scrutiny Leadership Board was established in July 2019 and has gone from strength to strength in providing a lead and a driving force for the scrutiny function at the Council. It has sought to improve the publicity of scrutiny committee meetings by ensuring that they are publicised on the Council's Facebook page prior to each meeting and has kept a watching brief over the work of all the scrutiny committees through receiving regular updates from each Chair. The link between the Audit Committee and scrutiny has also been improved and Audit now regularly refers issues to the scrutiny committees for consideration.

### Key pieces of work

- The Leadership Board developed a scrutiny self-assessment form that was circulated to all scrutiny members for response. The overview of responses was considered by the Leadership

Board informally in April 2021 and the actions identified included:

- Seeking evaluation of performance from officers
- Introduction of a 'back to basics' scrutiny training programme
- The SLB has continued to take an interest in the **Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy** and has been robustly examining the implementation of that Strategy to monitor targets and objectives.
- In the 2020/21 Municipal Year the SLB also reviewed the way in which budget and financial scrutiny was undertaken and developed a new way of carrying out such scrutiny. For the first time, the SLB reviewed financial performance monitoring information in March 2021, a role which it will carry out twice per year moving forward. This reporting will ensure that Members can regularly review the financial performance of the Council and make suggestions into future budget development as and when the ideas arise. The SLB also met informally in January 2021 to review the budget for 2021/22 and the findings were reported to the Executive.

### DEMONSTRATING SCRUTINY IMPACT: CORPORATE PERFORMANCE

**For the first time, the SLB has had the opportunity to feed into the development of the Council's Key Performance Indicators rather than simply monitoring performance against a set of already agreed indicators. Members considered a draft set of indicators and provided a number of suggestions for amendments and addition of which the vast majority were able to be incorporated such as the number of children placed in foster care and number of drug related deaths. The SLB will take a leading role in monitoring performance against this new set of indicators.**

### Ongoing work:

- Tree Strategy – initial feedback has been given on the draft strategy with requests to include sections on communication, schools, corridors and council values.
- Channel Shift Scrutiny Review – placed on hold due to the pandemic, this review was recommenced in April 2021 and will report its findings in the new Municipal Year.

## Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee

Due to the pandemic, the informal work of the committee has been imperative in ensuring relationships are maintained and Members are kept regularly informed regarding services' response to the pandemic, vaccination roll out and impact of the pandemic on ordinary service provision. The Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee have been regularly meeting with the Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Health and representatives of the Blackpool Clinical Commissioning Group to receive updates and the Committee has also been receiving regular communications from the local health Trusts and quarterly performance reports from Adult Services.

The Committee has had to be flexible and amend both its workplan and the meeting calendar due to the pandemic and the impact of it on the services that the Committee is responsible for scrutinising. It has been important to balance the need for scrutiny of these services to continue whilst ensuring that services are not over-burdened by requests for reports and input. That being said the pandemic is clearly a key aspect running through all work of the Committee in this Municipal Year.

At its meetings in September 2020 and March 2021, the Committee received overview reports on Adult Services covering all aspects of service provision and financial impact of the pandemic. This has allowed for Members to both focus on ongoing performance and service provision as well as the service's response to the pandemic and the additional measures put in place during this time.

The Committee has also received reports from the Clinical Commissioning Group on its performance including the impact of the pandemic on service provision, Public Health, Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust with an update on improvement from the previous Clinical Commissioning Group inspection and specific reports on perinatal and infant mortality and screening and vaccination.

### FOCUS POINT: MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The Committee remains committed to the scrutiny of mental health services provision and considers it of even more importance due to the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of residents.

Unfortunately the scheduled special meeting for March 2020 had to be postponed and was held instead in October 2020. During this meeting, the Committee noted the progress made to date and the impact of the pandemic on services. It was agreed that the Committees would continue to hold special meetings regarding mental health services and at the next meeting there would be a focus on mental health support for pregnant and new mums, memory assessment and peer support work.

### Key pieces of work

- The Committee established a **Drug Related Deaths Scrutiny Review** during which they gathered a huge amount of information on the work being undertaken to support vulnerable adults and prevent drug related deaths. The review concluded in April 2021 and the final report and recommendations of the review were being prepared for submission to the Executive at the time of writing this report.
- A notice of motion was agreed at Full Council that a scrutiny review be conducted of **Meals on Wheels** and whether such a service should be provided in Blackpool. A review was subsequently set up and received input from a wide range of representatives and sought community input through a questionnaire. Members considered the information available and will hold one final meeting to consider the outcome of an inquiry into what services other Councils are currently providing before submitting their recommendation.

### Policy Development input:

During 2020/2021 the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee has considered and contributed to the:

- Drug Strategy
- Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy

### Future focus:

The Committee remains committed to the ongoing review of mental health services and holding local health organisations to account regarding progress made in relation to previous Care Quality Commission inspections. Focus also remains on supporting health services, Public Health and Adult Social Care during the exceptional circumstances created by the pandemic.

## Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee

The focus of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee remains on Children's Social Care improvement, Youth Justice and special educational needs and disability provision and the Committee received progress and improvement reports on a different theme in each of these areas to each meeting. Despite the pandemic, regular scrutiny work in this service area has continued and indeed increased with improved involvement in strategy and policy development.

### Key pieces of work

- A review panel was established and completed during the 2020/2021 year looking at **Inclusion in Education**. Recommendations were approved by the Executive in November 2020 and the Committee is receiving regular updates on the progress of implementation. **Demonstrating the impact of scrutiny:** the recommendations sought to improve the in-year admissions process and improve the process and communication for parents and monitoring will ensure this happens.
- The Committee also conducted a review into the **Schools' response to the pandemic** and continues to monitor the implementation of the recommendations identified. The key recommendations wished to ensure that adequate mental health support was provided to children and young people in order to address the impact of the pandemic and recognised the hard work of schools, their commitment and effort during exceptional circumstances.
- At its meeting in January 2021, the Committee received the Children's Services **Medium Term Financial Strategy** and has been keen to ensure that the financial implications in reports to Committee are completed fully in order to carry out its new responsibility to consider the financial performance of Children's Services satisfactorily.
- The **A Better Start Scrutiny Review** held its final meeting in April 2021 and at the time of writing this report was compiling its final report and recommendations for submission to the Executive following which the implementation of the recommendations will be monitored by the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee. The review considered the progress and work of

A Better Start half way through the period of the project, considering value for money.

### MAKING A CONTRIBUTION AND CHANGING FOR THE BETTER: 10 YEAR EDUCATION STRATEGY

The Committee considered the draft strategy in great depth which culminated in a number of changes to the strategy agreed and implemented with the support of the Executive including:

- Wishing to ensure ownership of the strategy by schools, all stakeholders working together.
- Ensuring that the strategy sufficiently addressed those children who were gifted and talented.
- Indicating within the strategy regarding how the targets relating to Early Help and Place Based Working would be measured and monitored.
- In general, Members were very positive about the aspirational nature of the strategy and, subject to the amendments they had requested, supported the vision of the strategy.

### Co-Opted Members

The Committee's two co-opted Members Dr Allen and Ms Sage have provided a valuable contribution to the work of the Committee over the previous year. There remain two parent governor co-opted member vacancies on the Committee.

### Future Focus: Engagement with Young People

It is very important to the Committee to increase and improve engagement through scrutiny with young people in Blackpool. To this end, a special meeting will be arranged as soon as Covid restrictions allow to which young people will be invited.

The Committee has also included in its workplan a review of the experience of Looked After Children in Blackpool. The review will aim to gain an understanding of the journey of a cohort of Our Children including scrutiny of their experiences with various partners such as the Police, Health Services and schools.

**During the 2020/2021 Municipal Year the Committee has also contributed to:**

- The Literacy Strategy
- SEND Vision and Strategy
- Home to School Transport Policy

# Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee

The Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee has had multiple areas of focus over the previous 12 months including tourism recovery response to the pandemic, town centre regeneration, leisure services performance and has received annual reports relating to parks and green spaces and waste and street cleansing.

## FOCUS POINT: CLIMATE EMERGENCY

A key priority of the Committee has been the climate emergency declaration made by the Council and ensuring that targets and objectives are met in relation to that declaration. As a result of work around climate change, the Council's report template has been amended to include reference to the subject of the report's impact on climate and sustainability. Informal meetings are being regularly held to discuss progress in relation to climate change actions and the Committee is expecting to receive a full report on the findings of the Citizen's Assembly and the recommendations that might be identified.

## Key pieces of work

- On 2 December 2020, the Committee carried out its annual review of the **Community Safety Partnership**. Member discussed performance of the partnership in detail and highlighted and sought further information on reported incidents of domestic abuse and subsequent convictions; the number of reports of sexual abuse and rape, prosecutions undertaken and convictions achieved, along with a comparison of national trends; and the latest statistics regarding burglaries and reoffending in Blackpool. Further scrutiny of the new Community Safety Plan will take place in 2021/2022.
- The Committee completed its **Housing and Homelessness Scrutiny Review** following a short delay due to the pandemic. A number of recommendations were submitted to and approved by the Executive including requested amendments to the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol and the performance of services during the pandemic was praised with the swift action taken in housing rough sleepers noted. The Committee will be reviewing the implementation

of the recommendations in November 2021 and it is hoped that the recommendations will have a positive impact on the residents of Blackpool.

- The **Flood Risk Strategy** was considered at an informal meeting in January 2021 during which Members discussed communications with the public during flooding events and standardising reporting across the North West. It was agreed that progress report be provided in June 2021 on the implementation of the strategy, the establishment of local flood forums and progress on funding bids submitted.
- An **Illuminations** Scrutiny Review meeting was held on 27 April 2021, the panel discussed the illuminations business case for town deal funding, commercialisation and how the lights were commissioned. Members identified a number of areas for potential improvement which will be considered for their feasibility prior to being considered further by Members later in 2021.

## HAVING AN IMPACT: PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

A member of the public spoke to the Committee regarding concerns relating to **public rights of way**. In response to the concerns raised a full report was requested on the rights of way in Blackpool and the issues highlighted. As a result of the Committee raising the profile of the concerns regarding public rights of way and subsequent discussions, funding was allocated and assurance provided that the concerns will be addressed. This will remain an ongoing topic for review by the Committee.

## Future Focus: Arts and Culture

Members have noted the impact of the pandemic on arts and culture in the town and received an initial report to their meeting in April 2021. As a result they have determined to undertake a full review to identify the specific impact of the pandemic and the measures that have been and can be put in place in order to address the impact.

## Topics identified for review in 2021/2022 include:

- CCTV
- Economic Development

## Future policy development work identified:

- Sustainability Strategy
- Lancashire Waste Strategy
- Air Quality Strategy

## Cross Committee Working

A key focus for 2020/2021 has been building the links between the Audit Committee and the scrutiny committees. In order to build this link, the Chair of the Audit Committee sits on the Scrutiny Leadership Board and regular feeds in key findings from the Audit Committee that are relevant to scrutiny. Topics that have been addressed through joined up working between audit and scrutiny include:

- Input from the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee into the fostering audit.
- Internal audit input into the Channel Shift Scrutiny Review following its original referral for scrutiny review by the Audit Committee.
- Referral from the Audit Committee to the Tourism, Economy and Communities Committee that a scrutiny review be carried out into CCTV.

Key pieces of work that have been carried out jointly:

### Supported Housing

The Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee established a review looking at the issue of Supported Housing in Blackpool. Due to the remits of the Committees it was agreed that representatives from the Tourism, Economy and Communities Committee also be invited to contribute. The review was delayed by Covid and eventually commenced in November 2020. An interim report was submitted and approved by the Executive in April 2021, recommendations detailed below, and the review will conclude and submit a final report in due course.

- That Blackpool Council establishes its own standards for what supported housing should look like in the town and that scrutiny plays an active role in developing these standards.
- That the Council writes a letter to the local MPs setting out the key issues relating to supported housing in the town and requests that they lobby Government for new legislation that allows for more control over the sector.

It is hoped that the recommendations will go some way to improving the quality of supported housing for residents in Blackpool.

### Active Lives Strategy

The review of the Active Lives Strategy was led by the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny

Committee in conjunction with the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee. Members considered this strategy and made the following observations:

- More detail on how the sea-front could be utilised to encourage active lifestyles;
- Consideration be given to developing a communication and marketing program to help engage the public; and
- Greater consideration be given to how to increase the use of the facilities available in the town to encourage active lifestyles.

If implemented these suggestions will improve the offer to residents and increase public engagement and involvement.

### Community Engagement Strategy

Representatives from across the three scrutiny committees were sought to feed into the impact of the Community Engagement Strategy. Due to the impact of the pandemic the development of the strategy was put on hold for 12 months and it is expected that Members will meet again in October 2021 to re-commence work on this strategy.

## Training

In September 2020 a finance briefing was held for all scrutiny members and considered how to carry out budget scrutiny. Additional training for Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee Members was provided on the Children's Services Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Training sessions have also been held for the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee on the Youth Service Justice Plan and Children Born into Care, both held in February 2021. The Born into Care session was commended at Council for its insightfulness and has now been recommended to all Members and included in the Member Training programme.

Members have also been able to access and have attended virtual training through the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny on health scrutiny, adults social care scrutiny, virtual scrutiny meetings and resilience and risk.

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