

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2021**

Present:

Councillor Jackson (in the Chair)

Councillors

Burdess

Collett

Kirkland

Wilshaw

G Coleman

Galley

Walsh

In Attendance:

Councillor Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Aspirations and Community Assets

Councillor Neal Brookes, Enforcement, Public Safety, Highways and Transport

Councillor Jane Hugo, Cabinet Member for Climate Change

Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Business Enterprise and Job Creation

Councillor Lynn Williams, Leader of the Council

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

Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications

Lisa Arnold, Head of Parks Leisure and Catering Services

John Greenbank, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser (Scrutiny)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Paula Burdess and Councillor Paul Galley declared personal interests in Item 4 Executive and Cabinet Member Decisions. The nature of the interest was that they were both Board members of Blackpool Transport Services Limited and a Cabinet Member decision had been taken in regards to the National Bus Strategy.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 16 JUNE 2021

The Committee considered the minutes from its 16 June 2021 meeting. The Chair asked that his thanks to the previous Chair of the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Martin Mitchell, be added to the minutes.

The Committee agreed, subject to the above amendment, that the minutes of the last meeting held on 16 June 2021 were a true and correct record.

3 PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no public speakers on this occasion.

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2021**

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 16 June 2021.

Members discussed PH47/21 'National Bus Strategy' and queried if the strategy would cover all service providers in Blackpool or if it would only focus on Blackpool Transport Services Limited (BTS) as the main provider. In response Councillor Neal Brookes, Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Public Safety, Highways and Transport, explained that the adoption of the strategy was a requirement from central government, in order to receive ongoing funding for bus services. He also confirmed that all bus service providers in Blackpool had been consulted as part of the preparation of the strategy, which was aimed at improving frequency, routes and the quality of bus travel. A further report detailing a local Bus Service Improvement Plan would also be submitted to the October 2021 meeting of the Executive.

The Committee expressed concern regarding the decision PH56/21 'Lease for Showtown Museum'. It was noted that the agreed lease would last thirty years and start at £250k a year with increases every five years. Members asked if the agreed rental amount could not have been better spent on building a Council owned property for the museum and queried what safeguards existed to prevent significant rental increases. Councillor Lynn Williams, Leader of the Council replied that the lease was important to ensure that the museum project was delivered in a timely manner and that costs would be controlled through the terms of the lease. Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources, added that the five-year increases would be linked to inflation and be within an agreed cap.

The cost benefit of the installation of new wind turbines at the Solaris Centre, as outlined in EX33/21 'Solaris Centre: Renewable Energy Project', was discussed by members of the Committee, specifically the timescales envisioned for the Council to recoup the expenditure on the project. Councillor Jane Hugo, Cabinet Member for Climate Change, agreed to share the details of the project with the Committee following the meeting.

Members also noted EX38/21 'Community Renewal Fund', highlighting the tight deadlines for submission, and asked what processes had been undertaken to ensure that the projects selected would be the most beneficial for Blackpool. Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Business Enterprise and Job Creation outlined the application process that the Council had undertaken for projects for the fund. The bids submitted had been oversubscribed and had included a broad spectrum of schemes seeking funding. Therefore, the Council had selected a number of schemes for submission to the Fund, which had been chosen to ensure that they were balanced across various parts of Blackpool. The submission had been made on 18 June 2021 and the Council expected to hear which had been approved by the time of the Government's autumn spending review announcement.

Regarding EX36/21 'Blackpool Street Lighting and Traffic Signals Private Finance Initiative', Members queried if the new LED Luminaries could be used to ensure that public spaces were illuminated to assist in the prevention of crime and disorder.

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2021**

Councillor Hugo responded that the brightness of the new LEDs could be adjusted and consideration would be given to their placement to address disorder issues, but that this would be balanced with the need to reduce the environmental impact of street lighting, through reduced carbon emissions. It was also recognised that having clear dark times in residential spaces was of benefit to residents' mental wellbeing.

The loss of trees was raised in connection with EX35/21 'Blackpool Tree Strategy 2021 to 2031'. Members highlighted that 3,000 trees had been lost and 600 whips had been recorded as missing, Councillor Hugo responded that an investigation had taken place and a response to the issue was being developed. She also clarified that at a previous meeting the cost of whips had incorrectly been stated as £45 each, when the actual cost was 45p. The Committee also queried the loss of trees that had died after planting in residential areas and asked if these would be replaced. Councillor Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Aspirations and Community Assets, replied that they were unsure if this would be the case and agreed to confirm the Council's position regarding the replacement of dead trees following the meeting.

Members also noted the disparity in cost for whips and the cost of trees planted in residential areas, 45p for a whip in comparison to £300 for a tree. Councillor Hugo agreed that this needed greater rationalisation and stated that the adoption of a Tree Strategy would assist in standardising tree costs.

Regarding EX42/21 'Replacement of the Core CCTV System', Members queried how it would be ensured that once the wider CCTV network was replaced that cameras would be evenly distributed across Blackpool. Councillor Brookes explained that the wider network would be replaced following a review of the system, where the Police, emergency services, local communities and Councillors would be consulted. The final decision on the placement of cameras would also be subject to a risk assessment of proposed locations. He also confirmed that the Beach Patrol would be involved in the use of CCTV on the beach and promenade.

Members asked if the ongoing increase in material costs across the national economy would affect projects such as that agreed as part of EX43/21 'Investment in the Town Centre – Adelaide Street'. The Committee noted that increasing costs could mean that the cost of a project could become unaffordable for contractors. Councillor Williams explained that projects that had been agreed, had the costs confirmed in their contracts. If subsequently the costs rose for contractors, then conversations would take place with the Council to determine the projects' viability.

The Committee also asked if any consideration had been given to the use of individuals with expertise in delivering projects in difficult economic circumstances, such as in the third world. Councillor Williams replied that this could be taken into consideration going forward.

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2021**

In respect of PH69/21 'Design Codes', the Committee queried why design codes had only been applied for Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone (BEZ) and not the town centre. Councillor Williams replied that the short timescales for applying for the national pilot scheme had meant that the scheme at the BEZ was the most appropriate location. As a pilot scheme it would also allow the Council to gain an understanding of how the new design codes could be implemented and the impact on planning policy. Following this it was expected that the scheme would be extended to other parts of Blackpool.

The Committee agreed:

1. To receive further details of the Solaris Centre: Renewable Energy Project' following the meeting.
2. To receive confirmation of the Council's position regarding the replacement of dead trees following the meeting

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the contents of the Council's Forward Plan October 2021 to January 2022, relating to the portfolios of the Cabinet Members whose responsibilities fell within its remit.

Members queried what the purpose of the Sex Establishment Licensing Policy would be. Councillor Neal Brookes, Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Public Safety, Highways and Transport, responded that the policy would mean that the Council would not renew any sexual establishments licences once it had lapsed. However, it was noted that the policy did not cover massage parlours.

6 TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION UPDATE

The Committee agreed that consideration of the Town Centre Regeneration Update would be deferred to the 8 December 2021 meeting.

7 TOURISM PERFORMANCE UPDATE

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications, presented an update on tourism performance and the measures that had been put in place to aid the sectors' recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic. He informed the Committee that compared with the last full tourist season in 2019, the 2021 season had shown strong signs of recovery. Ongoing support for tourism would include the extension of the Illuminations period to January 2022. This would help attract more visitors over the winter period and enhance Blackpool's tourism offer.

The Committee queried if the increased footfall outlined in the report had correlated into an increase in bookings at hotels and bed and breakfasts. Mr Welsh responded that reporting on the level of bookings had taken place through the Tourism Recovery Group and had shown positive feedback and strong bookings for 2022. He added that the level of secondary spend had also been shown to be very good.

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2021**

Capturing customers through the use of marketing for the 2022 seasons was also discussed. Mr Welsh reported that conversations had been taking place with tourism partners to ensure that this would be possible. Due to the restrictions and challenges faced by Blackpool during the pandemic, the Council had led on the marketing for 2021 but it was intended that partners would lead for 2022 and determine how to “sell” the resort to potential visitors.

The cost of the Illuminations Switch-On was queried by the Committee. In response Mr Welsh explained that the switch on event was organised by MTV with a fee being paid by the Council, details of which could be provided following the meeting. He added that the Council also had input into the event as part of the negotiation with MTV to stage it. The Committee also noted that MTV would be staging two further events to support the switch on at their own cost.

The decision to hold the World Fireworks Championship on a Saturday during the Illuminations was queried, with members noting that it would be a very busy evening as a result. In response Mr Welsh explained that normally the fireworks would be launched from the North Pier, however this was unavailable for the 2021 event. Therefore the beach had to be utilised, which meant a date when the tide was low enough for the event to take place had to be selected. The Saturdays had been chosen as the tides were suitable and it was considered the best day to encourage visitors to also spend in the town centre and other venues. Following the event Mr Welsh confirmed that the staging of the event would be reviewed to determine its success.

Members of the Committee raised the issue of temporary holiday accommodation, such as Air BnBs, in Blackpool. These type of holiday lets were only available for a limited number days in a year and therefore were subject to less regulations than more traditional accommodation such as hotels. Councillor Williams, Leader of the Council informed the Committee that the Council was aware of the issue but that greater understanding was needed of the scale of the industry in Blackpool. It was therefore requested that the issue of temporary holiday accommodation be added to the Committee’s Work Programme. It was suggested to support this that a report be prepared to determine the scale and scope of such accommodation and its impact on Blackpool.

Mr Welsh also informed the Committee that work was being undertaken to consider new ways to deliver the Illuminations. This had included the establishment of a festival style installation on the headlands. A report on this work and the actions undertaken following the Illuminations Scrutiny Review Panel, held on 27 April 2021, would be brought to the 8 December 2021 meeting of the Committee.

Members of the Committee noted the contribution of the Beach Patrol during the Covid-19 pandemic to ensuring public safety and asked that its thanks be recorded and conveyed to the patrol members.

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2021**

The Committee agreed:

1. To add the issue of temporary holiday accommodation in Blackpool to the work programme.
2. That the Committee's thanks be recorded and conveyed to the Beach Patrol.

8 LEISURE SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT

Ms Lisa Arnold, Head of Parks, Leisure and Catering Services, presented the Leisure Services Annual Report, which outlined the delivery of services and included key performance data. Ms Arnold reported that the overall recovery from Covid-19 had been very good however it remained unclear how the pandemic had effected customer behaviour and their wiliness to attend leisure venues. It had also been noted that there had been a reduction in the number of school swimmers due to the closure of swimming pools, the service was therefore looking at how to encourage their return.

The Committee noted the potential for Blackpool to increase the participation of young girls in football, with a view to helping those who showed promise progress to become professionals and queried how this opportunity could be marketed. Ms Arnold replied that this had been recognised by the service and that a new Leisure Marketing Officer would be appointed with responsibilities that would include the promotion of sports such as women's football.

Encouraging the return of adult swimmers was also discussed with Ms Arnold explaining that the Blackpool Aquatic Society offered sessions to adults who wanted to learn to swim. She added that the Beach Patrol undertook educational sessions in schools to help promote swimming to children.

The marketing of the Holiday Activity Fund was also queried, with Members asking how its reach could be maximised, without causing those who qualified for the fund to be discriminated against. Ms Arnold responded that although children had to be in receipt of school meals to benefit from the fund, the activities undertaken by the fund were open to all children.

9 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee considered the Scrutiny Workplan report, including an update on the work undertaken by the CCTV Scrutiny Review Panel and the Arts and Culture Scrutiny Review Panel.

It was noted that the Arts and Culture Review Panel had recommended that the Council support the establishment of a Cultural Partnership for Blackpool and the development of a Blackpool Cultural Plan. The report asked that the Committee approve this recommendation for submission to the Executive at its November 2021 meeting.

The Committee agreed that the Work Programme and the outcomes of the CCTV Review Panel be noted and that the recommendation of the Arts and Culture Review Panel be forwarded to the Executive.

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2021**

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Committee was confirmed as Wednesday, 8 December 2021 at 6.00pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.15 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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