

CORPORATE PORTFOLIOS

The 'Corporate' portfolio consists of:

- Councillor Lynn Williams – Leader of the Council
- Councillor Ivan Taylor – Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Partnerships and Performance

The full details of the portfolio areas can be found on the Council's website at <https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Your-councillors/Executive-members.aspx>

Strategic Issues

New Leadership for Blackpool Airport

The Blackpool Airport Operations Board has now made a formal offer for the appointment of a Chief Executive following a competitive exercise and the transfer of the licences to the Council Company. This comes at a positive time for the Airport, which saw a significant increase in activity in 2021. With over 40,000 aircraft movements in the last year, despite early months of the year being in lockdown, Blackpool Airport was one of the busiest in the country.

Blackpool Local Plan Examination – on track for Summer 2022 adoption

Final approval of the Local Plan Part 2 - Publication version has taken a significant move forward with the publication of the findings of the Independent Planning Inspector. A standard part of the process, the Inspector appointed by Government, Luke Fleming, held the Examination Hearings from 6 to 10 December 2021. As a result, he has requested further information to complete his examination. Officers are currently preparing this additional information to be forwarded to the Inspector by mid-February 2022.

Following consideration of the information we provide, the Inspector will issue a letter to the Local Planning Authority advising of any modifications that are required to make the Local Plan Part 2 sound. These would be subject to public consultation in March/April 2022, giving people and stakeholders the opportunity to make representations about the modifications before the Inspector issues his final recommendations. Assuming that the Inspector considers the plan to be sound, the Local Plan Part 2 would be brought before Full Council for adoption in early summer 2022.

Corporate Issues

Financial Year 2021/22 – Monitoring to 31 December 2021 (Month 9)

In-year pressures remain high. The latest full-year forecast for 2021/22 anticipates that working balances are expected to fall by £5,616k to a surplus of £677k by the end of 2021/22.

The 3 principal areas of overspending are:

- Children’s Services, which is forecasting an overspend of £4,707k. Having increased the Children’s Social Care budget by £8.17m in August 2020, further investment was required to cover increases in numbers and unit costs of Looked After Children (LACs), and also to develop the placements market and increase the capacity within internal fostering. Spending on placements is reducing, but not yet in line with the ambitions set out in the Children’s Services Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- Strategic Leisure Assets, which is forecasting a pressure of £2,253k. The projected overspend on Strategic Leisure Assets of £951k (excluding Covid costs) will be carried forward and transferred to Earmarked Reserves. The forecast cumulative deficit as at 31st March 2022 is £15,886k. The Leisure Assets medium-term financial plan now forecasts the service to break-even, in-year, during 2025/26. This has increased from 2024/25 due to a delay in the Conference Centre income generation.
- Contingencies and Reserves is forecasting a pressure of £1,428k. There are savings from prior years that have not yet been met recurrently and these are currently showing a pressure of £1,412k, primarily corporate procurement savings (£662k) and non-essential spending (£750k). In addition there is an anticipated pressure of at least £1,500k relating to the pending pay award.

Whilst the overall forecast position represents a deterioration in the Council’s finances, things have improved over the last two months and plans are still being developed to address the in-year pressures besides progressing any outstanding budget savings that have been planned.

Covid Support to Council Wholly-Owned Companies

The Coronavirus pandemic led to a number of Council Wholly-Owned Companies (WOCs) facing significant income losses as a result of lockdown and subsequent social distancing restrictions.

In November 2020 the Executive approved the establishment of a £24m Covid Recovery Fund (PH46/2020), £20m plus a 20% contingency, ring-fenced for WOCs only, from within the existing Business Loans Fund.

To date there have been loan approvals of £13.3m against that facility of which £7.32m has been drawn down. £1.1m of this has subsequently been repaid. The Council's Business Loans Fund Panel monitors progress against the WOCs' respective recovery plans on a regular basis.

Non Covid-related loan support to WOCs

The Council also supports its WOCs' capital spending (capex) requirements where there is a robust business case demonstrating either a valid 'Spend to Save' initiative or an opportunity to spend to generate income. The Council's exposure to principal and capitalised interest in respect of such WOC capex loans is currently £41.02m.

Wholly-owned companies financial performance as at Month 9 2021/22

The consolidated forecast financial position of the Council's wholly-owned subsidiary companies is a loss of £1.13m based on their individual Month 9 financial monitoring reports. This represents an improvement of approximately £0.99m from the Month 8 position, resulting from some updates to forecasts for the 2021/22 financial year and the receipt of additional government funding.

Council Tax Collection

The Council Tax collection rate at the end of December 2021 was 74.78%, marginally down on the same time last year. An additional £6m has been collected in 2021/22 to date compared to 2020/21.

Welfare Support to our Residents

Funding has been made available to support Blackpool residents who are struggling to afford energy, water bills and other essential expenditure this winter. The Household Support Fund was recently announced by Central Government to help households most in need with food, energy, water bills and essential costs over the winter and up until March 2022.

The Household Support Fund can help by providing short term financial support to meet immediate needs and help residents who are struggling to afford energy, water bills and other essentials this winter. As funds are limited, we will prioritise costs relating to energy and water

bills but will also consider awarding a grant for other essential costs relating to keeping warm if there is an impact on the household budget. Details of how to apply can be found on our website and are not limited to residents who are in receipt of benefits.

Illuminations Extension and Christmas Campaign delivers record footfall across Blackpool

I am extremely pleased to report that the two-month extension of the Illuminations, coupled with Blackpool’s biggest ever Christmas campaign, has delivered exceptional footfall across the resort, with large increases across all four months of the autumn/winter season. This is a resounding endorsement of our decision to kick-start tourism recovery with large-scale investment in marketing and events.

The Christmas By The Sea campaign, which ran on the Tower Festival Headland from November 19 to January 3 and included a free skating rink, artificial snowfalls, light projection shows, log cabins, and large-scale light installations, resulted in a 75% increase in footfall on the seafront compared with the same period in the last pre-covid year.

The additional Christmas activity around St John’s Square and the Winter Gardens, combined with discounted parking, resulted in town centre footfall increasing by almost 28% over the same period, according to data from the Council’s footfall monitor provider Visitor Insights:

Promenade Footfall, September – December (full months)

	2021	2020	2019	2018
September	4,230,460	3,305,710	2,997,048	3,016,977
October	6,314,918	3,305,710	3,516,766	3,393,376
November	3,471,686	1,367,556	2,095,888	1,980,209
December	3,202,584	1,703,969	1,857,419	1,877,807
Total	17,219,648	9,682,945	10,467,121	10,268,369

Town Centre Footfall, September – December (full months)

	2021	2020	2019	2018
September	2,902,003	2,278,259	2,531,173	2,527,674
October	4,145,177	2,115,648	2,894,629	2,721,229
November	2,598,018	914,430	1,970,406	1,875,572
December	2,555,608	1,383,238	1,903,537	1,995,875
Total	12,200,806	6,691,575	9,299,745	9,120,350

Footfall during the Christmas campaign, November 19 to January 3

	2021-22	2019-20	% change from 2019-20 to 2021-22
Town centre	3,924,036	3,068,688	+27.9%
Promenade	4,966,570	2,835,421	+75.2%

The footfall figures are supported by record amounts of visitor interest recorded on the VisitBlackpool website over the extended Illuminations season, with all four months showing huge increases over 2019, and an overall increase in numbers of 140% and 99% respectively:

Unique Website Visits on VisitBlackpool, September – December (full months)

	2021	2020	2019	2018
September	366,224	263,529	179,004	183,415
October	408,025	262,361	194,366	214,405
November	231,564	66,381	73,108	74,828
December	179,213	98,763	45,808	51,893
Total	1,185,026	691,034	492,286	524,541

Page views on VisitBlackpool website, September – December (full months)

	2021	2020	2019	2018
September	1,030,044	765,971	611,544	697,654
October	1,239,013	696,907	722,253	821,841
November	651,865	141,859	232,075	249,597
December	457,825	232,786	131,575	161,607
Total	3,378,747	1,837,523	1,697,447	1,930,699

There is a similar picture on parking usage during the Christmas campaign, where the special £1 rate for three hours helped to increase Town Centre car parking by 37.5% to 37,893 vehicles, and Promenade parking up by 52.2% to 10,199. Discussions are already underway with various partners to build on this success in 2022.

Working with Partners

Town Deal Programme: from planning to delivery

I am delighted to report that we received confirmation from the Department for Levelling-Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) that funding for the following 5 Town Deal projects have been approved, reflecting Central Government's continued confidence with Blackpool as a place which delivers on our commitments. The Department has provided up-front funding to move the following projects into the delivery phase:

- Illuminations Rejuvenation
- Enterprise Zone
- Youth Hub
- Revoe
- The Edge

The Department requested further information on the Multiversity and Blackpool Central Courts Relocation schemes, the latter of which has already benefitted from £1m of funding for

the acquisition of the former Devonshire Road hospital site, and final approval is anticipated soon.

The Council is the accountable body for the Programme, which benefits from additional oversight by the multi-agency Town Deal Board and its supporting Town Deal Investment Panel. It needs to comply with DLUHC mandatory monitoring and evaluation requirements, which will involve reporting twice a year on inputs, activities and outputs, to be signed off by the Council's Chief Financial Officer.

All seven projects have designated Project Leads and delivery teams, to which we have recently added representation from the Council's Climate Emergency Team. Each project will be subject to a Service Level Agreement, with a Memorandum of Understanding or Grant Funding Agreement to be put in place for Revoe, Courts and Multiversity projects, as these include external partners.

Transforming Services

Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan

Following the approval of £50,000 from the Welcome Back Fund to revisit Blackpool's 2013 Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan, in November 2021 we appointed CBRE to undertake a full refresh of the document, ensuring it addresses the progress made in the interim, priorities arising from Covid-19 recovery, and to support delivery of our climate emergency action plan.

Engagement with town centre stakeholders is essential if the strategy is to address the right issues and have a deliverable action plan. Building on the extensive engagement undertaken on the Town Deal Programme, this will involve internal stakeholders and external stakeholders and continue into February. The aim is to have the new Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan completed by the end of March 2022.