

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING – THURSDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2015

Present:

Councillor Mrs Taylor (in the Chair)

Councillors

Elmes	Doherty	Galley	Mrs Jackson
I Coleman	Benson	L Taylor	Robertson BEM
Mrs Henderson MBE	M Mitchell	Smith	Mrs Callow JP

In Attendance:

Mr A. Cavill, Director of Place.

Mrs C. McKeogh, Deputy Chief Executive - Human Resources, Communications and Engagement.

Dr A. Rajpura, Director of Public Health.

Mrs M. McRoberts, Assistant Treasurer.

Mrs R. Henshaw, Corporate Development Officer.

Mr S. Sienkiewicz, Scrutiny Manager.

Councillor S. Blackburn, Leader of the Council.

Councillor F. Jackson, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Urban Regeneration.

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 22ND JANUARY 2015

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 22nd January 2015, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

3 PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Committee noted that there were no applications to speak by members of the public on this occasion.

4 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

The Committee considered the decisions taken since the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee by the Executive and Cabinet Members.

A question was raised in relation to decision number EX/5/2015 'Designation of Foxhall Conservation Area and Raikes Hall Conservation Area and Extension of Town Centre Conservation Area', as to whether any new developments would have to comply with any particular material or design specifications. In the absence of the relevant Cabinet Member, Councillor Wright, Mr S. Sienkiewicz, Scrutiny Manager, agreed to obtain an answer to the question and forward this onto the Committee members in due course.

In connection with decision number PH/8/2015 'Disposal of Land – Lancashire Energy Headquarters', it was asked whether the decision was considered to be ahead of time, given that no decision had yet been taken on the subject of fracking. Councillor Blackburn

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING – THURSDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2015

responded by pointing out that Blackpool and the Fylde College was keen to stress that it was an onshore and offshore energy college and so was not limited to the subject of fracking. The College had accepted funding which had been made available by Government.

The Committee agreed to note the Executive and Cabinet Member Decisions.

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the items contained within the Forward Plan, issue number 2/2015.

The Committee agreed to note the Forward Plan items.

6 HEALTHY COMMUNITIES THEME REPORT 2014/15

Dr A. Rajpura, Director of Public Health, presented a report to the Committee that detailed current performance information against Council priority 4, 'Improve Health and Wellbeing, especially for the most disadvantaged'.

He began by explaining the challenges for 2014/15, which were focussed around healthcare, lifestyle factors and the wider determinants of health.

Referring to healthcare, Dr Rajpura provided details of the NHS Health check programme, which was available to people between the ages of 40 and 74 to assess the risk of developing heart disease, stroke, diabetes, kidney disease and certain types of dementia. It was reported that all of Blackpool's GP practices had signed up to the programme which was achieving slightly above the target level of assessments. It was however accepted that not all of the people at risk were on the register and that work was being carried out with the Clinical Commissioning Group to identify as many people as possible who might be at risk.

On the subject of lifestyle issues, Dr Rajpura highlighted smoking as being a real issue and a major factor in ill health. He pointed out that approximately 400 people died prematurely each year in Blackpool as a result of smoking and that a further 8,000 suffered from smoking related diseases. The statistics were above the national average but were improving. A good example of this was that in 2007, 42% of pregnant mothers were smoking, a figure that had now been cut to 27%. Dr Rajpura spoke of the measures within the Lancashire Tobacco Control Strategy, which was being implemented across the County, as well as the provision of local smoking cessation services.

In relation to mental health issues, the Committee was informed of the work underway on the development of a Mental Health and Wellbeing Campaign Strategy for Blackpool to be implemented in 2015/16. Work was also continuing around suicide prevention and the de-stigmatisation of mental health problems, with the delivery of suicide awareness training (safeTALK) for frontline staff.

Dr Rajpura went on to speak about the work being carried out to reduce obesity levels, which he described as being particularly challenging, given the availability of high content sugar and salt foods. He pointed out the worrying statistics of 1 in 4 children being overweight upon entry into school and 1 in 3 upon leaving. He gave details of the healthy

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING – THURSDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2015

breakfast scheme within schools, the Better Start Scheme and breastfeeding programmes, all of which were helping to curb child obesity issues.

On the subject of alcohol, Members were informed that the high availability of relatively low cost alcohol continued to be a problem. Dr Rajpura spoke of the work being carried out in this area, including the curbing of advertising and the alcohol nurse liaison scheme in the Accident and Emergency department, which was working to reduce alcohol related hospital admissions.

Dr Rajpura responded to a number of questions from the Committee. On the subject of young people being educated to cook and eat healthy foods, he explained that a new programme would be launched in schools from September 2015 and that healthy eating would be a key theme. He did however point out that there were areas of Blackpool where good quality affordable food was not readily available.

On the subject of smoking, the Committee asked about the merit of trying to discourage young people from taking it up by highlighting the cosmetic angle, i.e. the effect of smoking on the skin and the smell on clothing. Dr Rajpura pointed out that those messages had been used but accepted that more could be done. He added that an aspiration for Blackpool would be for the town to become completely smoke free and quoted Los Angeles as an example of this.

On the question of food poverty, Dr Rajpura explained that 80% of obesity levels were directly linked to inappropriate food consumption which was largely attributable to the mass availability of high density cheap fast food since the 1970's.

Questions were also asked around the high levels of hospital admissions for self harm cases in ages up to 17 years. Dr Rajpura explained that there were strong direct links between mental health and depravation. Work was being done to increase the resilience of the young people within the town. He stressed the need for early intervention, particularly amongst the early teens group, which presented the highest level of cases.

The Committee then received a report that detailed current performance information against Priority 9 – 'Deliver quality services through a professional, well rewarded and motivated workforce'. The report was presented by Mrs C. McKeogh, Deputy Chief Executive, Human Resources, Communications and Engagement.

Mrs McKeogh spoke regarding the key issues under the priority for the last quarter. These included the exceptionally hard financial challenges faced by the Council over the next 3 years, with savings of £25 million being required in 2015/16 alone. In terms of moving forward, the Council recognised the need to build upon the leadership development already undertaken and was looking to develop the next Leadership Programme. The Council had obtained 'silver' re-accreditation under the Investors in People (IIP) Programme and an improved Individual Performance Appraisal (IPA) process was about to be introduced.

Sickness absence figures were then reported to the Committee, which currently stood at 10.16 days lost per full time employee. Of that figure, 62.49% was reported as short term (up to 4 weeks) and 37.51% long term. It was reported that stress, depression and anxiety

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING – THURSDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2015

remained the most common cause of sickness absence, at 22.09%. Mrs McKeogh gave details of the support for managers and employees who were affected by those conditions. These included training on managing work related pressure, an introduction to the mediation service and the Respecting Others Framework and the Time to Talk Day.

Details were then reported to the Committee about Labour turnover statistics, which had been previously requested by Committee Members. Mrs McKeogh explained that annual staff turnover had increased from 8.5% in March 2010, to 11.7% in November 2014 (excluding schools), largely as a result of increased redundancies. She discussed both the positive and negative impact of staff turnover with Members, before giving a breakdown of turnover for each of the Council's departments. It was explained that over the last 2 years, more people had left as a result of redundancy than had voluntarily left, with only 1% of leavers having been dismissed. The various reasons for voluntary leavers were then explained to the Committee, with salary improvement at 21% being the highest. Particular 'hot spot' problem areas for staff turnover within the Council had been identified. In the case of Children's Social Care, it was proving particularly difficult to recruit experienced social workers, team managers and senior managers. The same applied to senior managers within schools.

Mrs McKeogh went on to explain the numerous programmes and initiatives that the Council had in place to continue to make it a very attractive employment proposition. She also explained the improvements that the Council had achieved at the latest IIP accreditation, including getting better at praise and recognition and getting better at linking people to the vision and priorities of the Council. It was however acknowledged that the budget cuts continued to dominate the thoughts of staff, although as much support as possible was being offered in this area.

In relation to the Customer First service, Members were provided with a presentation and update from Mrs M. McRoberts, Assistant Treasurer.

Members were reminded of the services that were provided by Customer First, including those which were provided directly, via one stop service. There were also the services which Customer First logged requests for and services which were arranged via Customer First. The Committee was then informed of the implications of budget cuts to the service, which had reduced from £1.2 million in 2012/13 to £656,000 in 2014/15. As a consequence, the full time staffing of the service had reduced from 47.54 employees to 30.46. Waiting times on incoming calls had risen from 31 seconds to 3 minutes, 32 seconds on average and waiting time at the counter had gone up from 7 minutes to 12 minutes.

Mrs McRoberts went on to outline a number of service improvements that were underway, which would lead to a more efficient and streamlined way of operating. These included the recruitment of new key members of staff to take the service forward and improvement and advancement in digital access requirements. She concluded her report by explaining how elected members could become more involved in service improvement by checking the website to understand what was already contained on it, encouraging self help and shared responsibility and contacting the service if a customer needs help to access and understand the website.

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING – THURSDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2015

The Committee then heard from Mr A. Cavill, Director of Place, who presented a report that detailed current performance information against the following Council priorities;

Priority 7 – Improving housing standards and the environment we live in by using housing investment to create stable communities.

Priority 8 – Create safer communities and reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.

Referring to priority 7, Mr Cavill highlighted the work that was being carried out on housing. This was focussed on rebalancing the town's housing supply, driving up housing standards and tackling poor quality and poorly managed rental properties through enforcement activity. He referred to the new housing developments at Queens Park and on the site of the old illuminations depot which were currently on target. He also confirmed that funding had been secured from the Homes and Communities Agency to support the phase 2 development at Queens Park which would commence in early 2016.

The Committee was informed that the Council had agreed to establish a wholly owned housing regeneration company. The aim of the company would be to consider existing houses in multiple occupation (HMO), together with redundant guesthouses and to refurbish them to a good standard. The properties would then be let at open market rents and would be intensely managed. It was proposed to have the company established and operational in the early part of the next financial year.

Moving on to priority 8, the Committee was informed of the work underway around the following initiatives;

- To effectively implement the new Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.
- To address crime and anti-social behaviour through effective partnership working.
- To support the effectiveness of substance misuse treatment in conjunction with health.
- To campaign and raise awareness of community safety priorities as well as emerging issues.
- To work with partner agencies to ensure resources are targeted at the greatest need.

Mr Cavill pointed out that in most categories, crime statistics continued to fall, contributing to an overall decrease of 30% in the last 10 years. A breakdown of figures was provided to the Committee. Currently, the Council was working with the Town Centre Business Improvement District (BID) with a view to reintroducing CCTV monitoring in the near future.

The report was concluded by Mr Cavill informing the Committee of the work being undertaken with the police to tackle the problem of legal highs. Samples of legal highs on sale in the town had been tested at police headquarters and Community Protection Notices had been served on five premises.

Responding to questions from the Committee, Mr Cavill acknowledged that in certain categories, crime statistics had risen, although these tended to be in the areas considered to be less serious. He also confirmed that street pastors were involved in the night time

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING – THURSDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2015

economy of the town and worked on the Safe Haven Project.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

Background Papers: None.

7 CHILDREN’S SERVICES (SAFEGUARDING) SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL

The Committee considered a written report on the progress of the Children’s Services (Safeguarding) Scrutiny Review Panel.

The Committee agreed to note the content of the report.

Background papers: None.

8 EDUCATION SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL

The Committee considered a written report on the progress of the Education Scrutiny Review Panel.

The Committee agreed to note the content of the report.

Background Papers: None.

9. SCRUTINY PANEL UPDATE

The Committee considered a progress report on the appointed Scrutiny Panels.

Councillor Mrs Callow spoke about the Outside Bodies Scrutiny Panel meeting which had taken place with representatives from Blackpool Zoo on 17th February. She reported that visitor numbers and the overall spend at the zoo had gone up and that good progress was being made.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

Background papers: None.

10 COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

The Committee considered its Workplan for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

The Committee agreed to note the Workplan.

Background papers: None.

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee agreed to note that the date of the next meeting would be confirmed at Annual Council on 22nd May 2015.

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING – THURSDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2015

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.32 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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