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**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2022**

**Present:**

Councillor Jackson (in the Chair)

Councillors

G Coleman  
Collett

Galley  
Walsh

Wilshaw

**In Attendance:**

Councillor Neal Brookes, Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Public Safety, Highways and Transport

Councillor Lynn William, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Tourism and Culture

Councillor Mrs Maxine Callow JP, Scrutiny Lead Member

Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services

Nick Gerrard, Growth and Prosperity Programme Director

John Paul Lovie, Waste Services Manager

Clare Nolan-Barnes, Head of Coastal and Environmental Partnership Investments

Will Britain, Head of Highways and Traffic Management

John Greenbank, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser (Scrutiny)

**1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made on this occasion.

**2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 8 DECEMBER 2021**

The minutes of the last meeting held on 8 December 2021 were agreed as a true and correct record.

**3 PUBLIC SPEAKING**

There were no applications from members of the public to speak on this occasion.

**4 TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION UPDATE**

Mr Nick Gerrard, Growth and Prosperity Programme Director gave a presentation on the regeneration projects ongoing in the town centre as part of the Councils £1bn+ Growth and Prosperity Programme. Information was provided on the progress of individual projects and funding opportunities going forward.

The Committee was informed that data showed that people were returning to the town centre following the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions. This included footfall in the town

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2022**

centre being recorded at 2.5m visits in December 2021 which represented an 85% increase on 2020 and a 34% increase on 2019.

Town centre shop vacancy remained a concern with 23.2% of shops being vacant in November 2021, although this had since fallen. This issue would therefore be taken into consideration as part of the revision of the Town Centre Strategy. The Strategy had been created in 2013 and would be updated to take into account issues such as the changing local and national priorities, Covid-19 recovery and the Climate Emergency Declaration. Initial consultations on the Strategy had started in January 2022 and an action plan would also be developed which would be refreshed every five-years. In response to a query, Mr Gerrard confirmed that the action plan would also include a communications plan to highlight the benefits of the work being undertaken in the town centre to local businesses and residents.

The Strategy would look to address the number of shop vacancies by making the town centre more attractive to retailers. It was hoped that if footfall could be increased through bringing more people into the town through projects such as new offices and leisure attractions then new shops might be opened.

Mr Gerrard updated the Committee on major investments in the town centre. He reported that over £830m had been spent in the last ten-years and a further £1bn was being or would be invested in the town centre and the wider borough on projects such as the Talbot Gateway Phases Two and Three, the Winter Gardens Conference Centre and Blackpool Central.

It was forecast that phase two of the Talbot Gateway project would be complete by the end of 2022 and would deliver a new hotel and pedestrian links from Blackpool North Train Station to the tramway and other public transport. Phase three of the project had also been agreed for a major new office block in the town centre which would house approximately 3,000 employees of the Department for Work and Pensions. Enabling work for the project had begun in early 2022, with contract working beginning in the summer with completion planned for 2024.

Work had also begun to prepare for the £300m leisure investment in Blackpool Central. The project would create new leisure attractions in the town centre and create up to one thousand new jobs. The opening of a “flying” theatre in Windsor was highlighted by the Committee, asking if this meant the claim that Blackpool’s theatre would be the first of its kind in the country would no longer be correct. Mr Gerrard responded that the planned flying theatre in Blackpool would be much bigger than the one opened in Windsor and would be unique in the experience it could offer.

Elsewhere in the town investment in the quality and stock of hotel rooms would eventually deliver an additional nine-hundred and seventy new beds across Blackpool in existing and new hotels such as the four star Holiday Inn at Talbot Gateway.

The Committee was also informed that the Winter Gardens Conference Centre had opened following its completion and that the first major event, a party political conference, was scheduled for spring 2022.

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2022**

Mr Gerrard also reported that work on Blackpool's first dedicated town museum, "Showtown" had begun at the new Sands hotel in August 2021 and was planned for completion by April 2023. It was estimated that once finished the museum would attract nearly 300,000 visitors each year.

Main works had also begun on the Houndhill Phase Two Extension. The extension would house the relocated Wilko store from Talbot Road, two restaurants and a unique multimedia cinema/conferencing and entertainment centre. The project was estimated to cost approximately £20m of which £5m had been provided by the national Getting Building Fund.

Abingdon Street Market's refurbishment was also considered, with Mr Gerrard reporting that £3.64m would be invested to improve the existing retail area and create new food and drink areas to attract visitors. He also stated that the project, which was funded by the Getting Building Fund, had shown the importance of preparation work which had enabled a successful bid to be made and allowed refurbishment work to begin on the site promptly after funding had been received.

The use of funding received from the Welcome Back Fund of £345,543, was highlighted. This money had been used to fund projects such as the creation of an outdoor eating area in St John's Square, the beautification of the town centre and a number of safe celebration events during the summer of 2021.

Members of the Committee were also informed of the £1.5m invested in the Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) project. This money had been used improve storefronts in the façade of the Winter Gardens, establishing a creative hub on Topping Street, a pilot of lets in the town centre for creatives to live and work, and support a high street cultural events programme.

Money had also been secured as part of the Blackpool Town Deal for five town centre projects. This included £500k for a Youth Hub to support young people into work, £4.5m for The Edge project to create new modern office space for new start-up businesses, a further £4.5m for the Illuminations to deliver new attractions and upgrade infrastructure and £9m for the site assembly for the Multiversity project to relocate Blackpool and the Fylde Coast College to a new carbon neutral campus in the town centre.

The Town Deal would also deliver £7m towards the £34m required for the relocation of the Blackpool Courts to a new site on Devonshire Road. This project would deliver the land needed for additional leisure attractions in central area and allow for the construction of modern new court buildings for Blackpool. Noting that it was important for the Council to have control of the land for any proposed new development, the Committee asked why a compulsory purchase order had not been used to secure the Courts site. Mr Gerrard explained that as the land was owned by the Crown, a CPO could not be used and therefore the Courts' agreement to a move was needed.

Mr Gerrard also reported that whilst the Council had not been successful in securing funding for three projects in its first round of bidding from the Levelling-Up Fund this did not prevent it being able to bid into the second round that would be held later in 2022, for which the Council was awaiting the publishing of the relevant criteria.

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2022**

The Committee also discussed the release and subsequent retraction, of information that could have potentially been used to identify the location of the Multiversity project in November 2021. Mr Gerrard explained that until the Council was certain that it had the funds to pursue the site assembly it did not want to prematurely release information that could cause unnecessary uncertainty. Discussions would only commence with those affected after the Government had confirmed the funding. He also explained the compulsory purchase process and noted that if such a course of action were necessary then it would be the responsibility of the Council to demonstrate that there was a compelling case in the public interest.

Risk associated with the various projects was discussed, with members of the Committee asking what mitigation was in place. Mr Gerrard explained that all projects had a number of hurdles to overcome which required work to ensure they were viable and risks mitigated. All proposals were also monitored by the Council's statutory Section 151 Officer, Mr Steve Thompson, ensuring that all projects were properly developed financially. The Council also undertook vigorous due diligence of any proposals by potential partners to determine if they were deliverable. Important mitigation also included the Council retaining control of the land even if a project could not be delivered.

The Committee agreed:

1. That the report be noted; and
2. That the presentation slides be shared with members of the Committee.

## **5 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS**

The Committee noted the Executive and Cabinet Member decisions taken since the previous meeting.

## **6 FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the Forward Plan February 2022 – May 2022 and noted the list of upcoming decision.

## **7 WASTE SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT**

Mr John-Paul Lovie, Waste Services Manager presented an update on the Council's Waste, Cleansing and Streetscene services. The report detailed the work undertaken since the Enveco, a Council wholly owned company, had been established to undertake various waste services in Blackpool.

The Committee discussed the importance of succession planning with officers, noting that the report highlighted that employees were being upskilled to be able to undertake a wider range of work. Although this was welcomed a concern was raised that by doing this, more specialist skills particularly in relation to horticulture, could be lost. Mr Lovie replied that this had been recognised and that waste services was looking at how to retain such specialist skills going forward.

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2022**

Mr Lovie also informed the Committee, in response to a query regarding the planned expansion of services undertaken by Enveco, that a number of commercial waste collection contracts had been taken back by the company and there had been a growth in the trade waste collected in Wyre. He added that as a wholly-owned private company, Enveco was able to do more than an in-house service, while retaining the same vision as the Council to deliver for residents and invest in problematic areas. Mr John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services, added that Enveco had grown to have a £12m turnover and was increasing the number of people it had engaged with. The company had also established a new Training and Development facility at the Layton Depot which would help improve the quality of service the staff offered. He also explained that the Council had engaged local people regarding what they could do to help improve their areas.

Mr Blackledge also reported that a new set of key performance indicators would be developed as part of the services improvement programme. This would allow services to better review performance and identify areas for improvement.

The issue of weeds was discussed as an area of historical, frequent local complaint. Members reported that they had received positive feedback from residents regarding the response from the service to addressing weeds. Mr Lovie welcomed the feedback and added that investment had been made into doubling the weed treatment resources, purchasing new equipment and training for staff, along with the development of a weeds plan to address the issue going forward.

A query was raised by the Committee regarding why the collection of bulky items remained outside of Enveco and was the responsibility of a private contractor. Mr Lovie explained that the timescales involved in establishing the company had meant that Enveco had been unable to integrate the bulky items contract into its services. However, he added that once the contract came up for renewal the Council would consider its integration with the company.

Members of the Committee welcomed the report and expressed the view that the service had improved following the establishment of Enveco. It was noted that the service had saved £750k and that public feedback had been largely positive. Mr Lovie added that the focus would remain on driving quality. Councillor Lynn Williams, Leader of the Council also stated that the company had delivered for residents and that work would continue to engage the community and show how to improve areas through collaborative working.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

## **8 FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT**

Ms Clare Nolan-Barnes, Head of Coastal and Environmental Partnership Investments, presented the Flood Risk Management Annual report. This report outlined the work undertaken during 2021-2022 to ensure that the Council had met its statutory duties in respect of flood risk.

The Committee was informed that following the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions the Council would be looking at resuming local area Flood Forums. She also announced that the

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2022**

Environment Agency would be hosting a Flood Hub for residents to engage with them regarding local issues. The Lancashire Flood Risk Management Strategy had also been agreed and Ms Nolan-Barnes stated that details of performance against its Business Plan would be included in future annual reports.

Members welcomed the resumption of meetings of the Flood Forums, and discussed the role of flood risk management in planning applications, noting that drainage details had been missing in some. Ms Nolan-Barnes emphasised the importance of managing flood risk at the planning stage and confirmed that engaging in planning was part of the Lancashire Flood Risk Strategy's business plan. She added that this would involve ensuring developments outlined details of how water was dealt with. Mr John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services, also informed the Committee that a Community Flood Risk Resilience Policy was being developed which would include the importance of flood risk management in planning. The policy would also emphasise the importance of public ownership of flood risk and the need for everyone involved to play a role. The Committee agreed that the policy be brought to a future meeting to allow Member input.

Ms Nolan-Barnes also confirmed that the names of individuals who had come forward in 2020 to act as points of contact for flood risk had been retained and the Council was considering how to advertise people and services that could be called in a flood event.

The Committee agreed;

1. That the report be noted; and
2. That the Community Flood Risk Resilience Policy be brought to a future meeting to allow scrutiny input.

## **9 BATHING WATER MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT**

Ms Clare Nolan-Barnes, Head of Coastal and Environmental Partnership Investments, presented the Bathing Water Management Annual Report, which outlined the work undertaken in 2021/2022 to meet the Council's statutory duty in respect of bathing water quality. She informed the Committee that the statutory duty of warning against swimming during pollution events had been fulfilled by the Beach Patrol during 2021/2022.

Members also discussed the work being undertaken to improve bathing water quality with the Council's partners in the Turning Tides partnership. Ms Nolan-Barnes reported that although pollution could be influenced by outside factors such as the weather, the partnership had been successful in retaining high scores for the Fylde Coast's bathing waters from the Environment Agency.

The Committee queried how many discharges of waste water into the sea had been undertaken by United Utilities (UU) during 2021/2022. In response, Ms Nolan-Barnes reported that the number of discharges allowed by UU was determined by the Environment Agency, and exceeding this limit would incur significant financial penalties. She added that the number of discharges made was publically available and that where the information was available could be provided.

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2022**

It was also asked if, in light of increased developments, the Council expected more flood overflows in Blackpool. Ms Nolan-Barnes replied that the impact on local residents of flooding could be significant and therefore developers were encouraged to consider drainage and how water was managed in planning applications to prevent flooding.

The Committee also asked that the details of the use of flood management infrastructure, such as the Anchorsholme Pumping Station, to prevent flooding be highlight to the community. It was hoped that in doing so the Council could show the success of investments in such infrastructure. Ms Nolan-Barnes agreed that communications with the public were important and noted that UU held details of the operation of flood management infrastructure which could be shared at future Flood Forum meetings.

The Committee agreed

1. That the report be noted; and
2. That information on the number of waste water discharges made by United Utilities be provided to the Committee.

## **10 HIGHWAYS MAINTENANCE REPORT**

Mr Will Britain, Head of Highways and Traffic Management, gave a presentation on the current and future approach by the Highway Service to managing the Council's road network and related groups of road infrastructure assets.

The presentation gave details of how highways were managed prior to 2009 and how improvements had been made since that time. These included the movement to a new colour coded system to identify where road maintenance work was required which allowed for a more efficient and cost effective response to issues. This system which coded roads by four colours, blue for no issues, green for minor issues but no work required, amber for significant issues developing and red for a road that required closure to maintain, had been recognised nationally and implemented by other local authorities in the North West. Using the system the Council focussed on amber roads, where issues had started to develop, but the use of light treatment meant that repairs could be accomplished quickly and more cost effectively than if it were to degenerate to a red level.

The use of this system had also allowed the Council to secure £600K in funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) to develop innovations for asset data collection. From this, the Council was further able to undertake Project 30 which included the borrowing of £30m for a four year capital investment in Blackpool's roads, based on the data obtained.

Blackpool had also established the Local Councils Road Infrastructure Group, which included various other local authorities and acted as a forum to promote collaborative working and share best practice.

Mr Britain further reported that during the Covid-19 lockdown the Council's Roads' Maintenance Team had remained in operation. This had been achieved from

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2022**

reorganisation of shift patterns and other safety measures. During this time the team was able to undertake vital road maintenance, as well as assist other Council services, such as grave digging at the Arboretum.

Members of the Committee were also told that the Gross Asset value of Blackpool's roads was £906m. As part of the funding to maintain this asset the Council received £1.5m from the Department for Transport (DfT). This was based on annual assessments from Internal Audit, which stated that the roads were within the DfT's Band Three.

The priority order for maintenance of roads was queried by the Committee. In response to which Mr Britain confirmed a copy of the list could be shared with the Committee. It was also added that the Council maintained a list of pavements in need of maintenance, the priority list for which could also be shared. Mr Ian Large, Performance Manager, Highway and Traffic Management Services, added that investment to develop flex footways in Blackpool was being applied for through the City Fibre project. This project would secure part of a £58m fund for the North West to install a fibre network in Blackpool's pavements.

The Committee agreed;

1. That the report be noted; and
2. That the priority list of Blackpool's roads and pavements be shared with Members of the Committee.

## **11 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN**

The Committee agreed its workplan and noted the updates to previous recommendations.

## **12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Committee noted the date and time of the next meeting as Wednesday, 30 March 2022.

## **Chairman**

(The meeting ended at 8.30 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:  
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