

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER 2022**

Present:

Councillor Jackson (in the Chair)

Councillors

Galley	M Mitchell	Wilshaw
Hutton	Walsh	

In Attendance:

Councillor Mrs Maxine Callow, Scrutiny Lead Member

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

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

Councillor Jane Hugo, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment

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

Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration

Nick Gerrard, Growth and Prosperity Programme Director

Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications

Joceline Greenaway, Head of Life Events

Mark Golden, Head of Accountancy

Anna Fothergill, Customer Relations Manager

Peter Legg, Head of Economic and Cultural Services

Carolyn Primett, Head of Arts

Clare Nolan-Barnes, Head of Coastal and Environmental Partnerships

Robert Snape, Low Carbon and Sustainability Officer

Jenni Cook, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Paul Galley declared a personal interest in respect of item 7, Town Centre Regeneration Update and item 9, Developing a Cultural Plan for Blackpool, the nature of the interest that he was Chair of the Blackpool Transport Company Ltd Board.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 29 JUNE 2022

The minutes of the last meeting held on 29 June 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

3 PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no applications for public speaking on this occasion.

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4 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Executive and Cabinet Member Decisions taken since the last meeting.

A query was raised in respect of PH55/2022, Peppercorn rent for 28 Topping Street, regarding an update on the prospective tenant. Councillor Lynn Williams, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Tourism, Arts and Culture, advised that the tenant was Aunty Social and she agreed to clarify the timeline and inform the Committee.

The Committee discussed EX33/2022, Levelling Up Fund Round Two, in relation to the multiversity and Hotel Indigo. Councillor Lynn Williams, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Tourism, Arts and Culture, informed the Committee that levelling up applications were proceeding with decisions expected in the Autumn.

The Committee discussed EX35/2022, Acquisition of Land for the Multiversity, and in respect of Compulsory Purchase Orders Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Job Creation, advised that all notifications had been sent out to 67 residential and commercial premises and that negotiations were proceeding.

The Committee also discussed PH58/2022, in relation to traffic restrictions on Madison Avenue and Councillor Neal Brookes, Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Public Safety, Highways and Transport, advised that the restrictions had been proposed following complaints of hazards at the junction. Councillor Brookes also confirmed that if any member had concerns of complaints regarding road surface treatments then they should raise it with him directly.

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan October 2022 to January 2023 of upcoming decisions.

The Committee discussed decision 2/2021, applications for business loans above £500,000 and requested further, anonymised, information regarding how many loans had been issued, repayments and defaults. Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communication and Regeneration, advised that information regarding this could be provided once per quarter.

Resolved:

To note the update and to request that further information is provided regarding business loans on a quarterly basis.

6 TOURISM PERFORMANCE UPDATE

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications presented the Tourism Performance Update which provided information on tourism performance during the main season from April to the end of August 2022.

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The Committee was provided with an overview of tourism and visitor figures and marketing activity undertaken for the first full tourism season since 2019. Visitor figures were now monitored via Visitor Insights which utilised anonymised GPS and mobile tracking data and the 2021 total visitors stood at circa 19 million which pointed to a strong economic recovery.

The Committee discussed the update and in response to comments Mr Welsh advised that sustaining these figures would present a challenge due to the current cost of living crisis and overseas travel opening back up. In order to encourage visitors, free events were the cornerstone of Blackpool tourism, such as the Airshow, the Illuminations, Lightpool, the Firework Championships and Christmas events. Promotion of events continued in conjunction with the Tourism BID team and internet/social media marketing was an essential tool in promoting Blackpool.

The Committee noted its thanks to Mr Welsh and his team for their hard work in promoting the town and recovery work undertaken post-Covid.

Resolved: To note the update.

7 TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION UPDATE

Mr Nick Gerrard, Growth and Prosperity Programme Director, provided the Committee with a presentation which outlined recent Town Centre performance, the Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan and a summary of the Town Centre elements of the Growth and Prosperity Programme.

The Committee was advised that town centre performance over 2.75 million visits had been recorded during July 2022 and whilst this number was down by 11% on the July 2021 visits, the numbers were extraordinarily high in terms of what had been recorded in Blackpool over the past four years. Dwell time in the town centre was lower in July 2022, but research had found that people were visiting more places, staying for shorter amounts of time in the town centre when they visited, but were visiting more premises and businesses.

Town centre vacancy rates had fallen and were at the lowest level since mid-2018. Vacancies within the Principal Retail Core was still high and around 4% higher than mid-2016, when rates were at their lowest. The Committee was advised that in order to improve vacancy rates both in the town centre and in peripheral areas there was a need to engage with landlords and town centre stakeholders. The Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan, approved by the Executive in May 2022, identified six key priority areas: Public Realm; Zoning and Districts; Community; Events and Meanwhile uses; Culture and Entertainment and Heritage. Further work was being undertaken on the Plan through further engagement with others including Tourism Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee, the Town Centre BID and other stakeholders prior to being taken to back to the Executive for approval.

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The Committee was provided with an update on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and two Investment Plans had been submitted in June and August 2022 to access an earmarked £5.8m of Shared Prosperity Fund money some of which was allocated to help implement the Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan. The Committee discussed the importance of focusing on the environment and wellness, the need for green space in the Town Centre and strong public transport links to connect the Town Centre with outlying areas. In response to questions from the Committee Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications confirmed that The Grand Theatre ran a theatre ticket and public transport package.

Mr Gerrard provided a summary of the Talbot Gateway Phase 2 and 3, Blackpool Central and other Town Centre projects. In relation to Blackpool Central, the Committee was advised that discussions were underway with the Courts Service in respect of their building's relocation. The Committee's attention was drawn to The Platform project and discussion took place in relation to parking and security in the Town Centre in the evenings.

The Committee thanked Mr Gerrard for his presentation and noted thanks to his Team for their work on Town Centre regeneration.

Resolved: To note the update.

8 CUSTOMER FEEDBACK ANNUAL REPORT

Ms Joceline Greenway, Head of Life Events and Ms Anna Fothergill, Customer Relations Manager, presented the Annual Customer Feedback report which covered the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 and summarised the Council's performance in dealing with complaints, the themes within customer feedback, and included an overview of complaints made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

The Committee discussed the report and was advised that work was being undertaken to identify trends. More work was required to identify and improve on learning points and outcomes of upheld complaints and to improve upon sharing this by using the Hub. Ms Fothergill advised the Committee that further information on complaint themes and complainants could be included within future reports. The Committee requested that the report returned to them in eight month's time and that it included a more detailed breakdown of complaint themes, complainants and learning outcomes.

The Committee thanked Ms Greenaway and Ms Fothergill for their attendance and the hard work of the Customer Relations Team.

Resolved:

1. To note the Annual Report.
2. To request that the report be brought back to the Committee in eight months time and include more detailed information in relation to complaint categories, complainants and learning outcomes.

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9 DEVELOPING A CULTURAL PLAN FOR BLACKPOOL

Mr Peter Legg, Head of Economic and Cultural Services and Ms Carolyn Primett, Head of Arts, provided the Committee with a report that informed members about the work taking place in setting up a Blackpool Cultural Framework Steering Group that would be leading on developing a new five year Cultural Plan for Blackpool. Plan would set out the town's cultural development priorities, the support required for the local cultural sector to recover and thrive after the Covid pandemic, and would set out the benefits of a strong cultural sector in supporting the well-being of local communities and the growth of cultural tourism.

The Committee was provided with a summary of the draft Terms of Reference for the Steering Group and the proposed membership. Funding had been secured from the Arts Council to enable the Cultural Framework and this would be managed by Blackpool Council as the accountable body. Should any contracting of freelance advisors, critical friends or consultants be required, or other associated costs for the work incurred, then this would be undertaken by the Council, adhering to its procurement policy.

The Committee discussed the report and requested that the Steering Group engage with the Heritage Tram Company. Ms Primett advised the Committee that the Steering Group would engage with non-traditional strands of culture as appropriate and that a full Cultural Plan would be presented to the Committee in around twelve month's time.

Resolved: To note the report and receive a full Cultural Plan in approximately 12 months.

10 HEALTH OF THE OCEAN

Ms Clare Nolan-Barnes, Head of Coastal and Environmental Partnerships and Mr Robert Snape, Low Carbon and Sustainability Officer, provided the Committee with a report that informed it of concerns relating to the health of the ocean. The report requested that the Committee consider making a recommendation to Council to declare an urgent need for ocean recovery.

Councillor Jane Hugo, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment advised the Committee of the local authorities who had already declared an urgent need for ocean recovering using a locally adapted resolution and provided a summary of the recommendations that would enable the Council to carry out work in partnership with the fishing industry, the community and residents.

Resolved:

That the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee recommends that Council declares an urgent need for ocean recovery as follows:

1. Report to Full Council within 12 months on the actions and projects that will begin an ocean recovery in Blackpool.

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2. Embed ocean recovery in all strategic decisions, budgets, procurement and approaches to decisions by the Council (particularly in planning, regeneration, skills and economic policy), aligning with climate change mitigation and adaptation requirements, and considering ocean-based solutions in our journey towards a carbon neutral and climate resilient future.
3. Ensure that local planning supports ocean recovery, working closely with the Marine Management Organisation to embed strong links between the Local Plan and the Blackpool Marine Plan to support ocean recovery.
4. Ensure that the Blackpool Blue Green Strategy strives to support ocean recovery.
5. Work with partners locally and nationally including our continued involvement with the Turning Tides Partnership to deliver increased sustainability in local marine industries and develop a sustainable and equitable blue economy that delivers ocean recovery and local prosperity, including the local fishing industry and the vital work of IFCA in the North West.
6. Grow ocean literacy and marine citizenship in the Blackpool, including ensuring all pupils are given the opportunity to have a first-hand experience of the ocean before leaving primary school – striving to include home-schooled children - and promote sustainable and equitable access to the ocean through physical and digital experiences for all residents.
7. Create an online portal on the Council website to update on ocean recovery progress, signpost to ocean literacy development opportunities, and marine citizenship pledges.
8. Write to the Government to put the ocean into net recovery by 2030 by:
 - a. Working with coastal communities to co-develop marine policy to ensure it delivers equitable and sustainable outcomes in local place making.
 - b. Appoint a dedicated Minister for Coastal Communities.
 - c. Stop plastic pollution at source by strengthening the regulations around single-use plastics and set standards for microfibre-catching filters to ensure that all new domestic and commercial washing machines are fitted with a filter that captures a high percentage of microfibres produced in the wash cycle.
 - d. And by listening to marine and social scientific advice to update the Marine Policy Statement and produce a national Ocean Recovery Strategy which will:
 - i. Enable the recovery of marine ecosystems rather than managing degraded or altered habitats in their reduced state.
 - ii. Consider levelling up, marine conservation, energy, industrial growth, flood and coastal erosion risk management, climate adaptation and fisheries policy holistically rather than as competing interests.
 - iii. Develop a smarter approach to managing the health of the entire ocean that moves beyond Marine Protected Areas and enables links to be made across sectors towards sustainability.
 - iv. Establish improved processes for understanding the benefits of ocean recovery, leaving no doubt the links between this and human lives, livelihoods, and wellbeing.

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11 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee considered the Scrutiny Workplan and noted that a report in relation to customer feedback would be added to the Workplan for eight months time.

Resolved: To add a customer feedback report to the Committee for eight months time.

12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved: To note the date of the next meeting as 23 November 2022.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 8.04 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
Jennifer Cook, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser
Tel: 01253 477212
E-mail: jennifer.cook@blackpool.gov.uk