

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2022**

Present:

Councillor Jackson (in the Chair)

Councillors

Galley	Kirkland	Walsh
Hutton	M Mitchell	Wilshaw

In Attendance:

Councillor Mrs Maxine Callow, Scrutiny Lead-Member

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

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

Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications

Vikki Piper, Head of Housing

Richard Williams, Production Manager

John Greenbank, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser (Scrutiny)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Paul Galley declared a personal interest in respect of Executive Decision EX43/2022 “Enhanced Bus Partnership and Revised Bus Service Improvement Plan” contained with item 4, Executive and Cabinet Member Decisions, as the Chair of the Blackpool Transport Company Ltd Board.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 28 SEPTEMBER 2022

The minutes of the last meeting held on 28 September 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

3 PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no applications for public speaking on this occasion.

4 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

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

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan December 2022 to March 2023 of upcoming decisions.

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2022**

Members considered Town Centre Investments and asked that in advance of the public announcement of any future major investments by the Council that Councillors be informed. It was noted that this would allow members to be better able to address constituent queries that could arise as the result of investments.

Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Job Creation, agreed that this would be undertaken in advance of any future announcements regarding major investments, recognising the benefits providing this information to members would have.

The Committee also asked that it be noted that Councillor Lynn Williams, Leader of the Council, had not been in attendance at the meeting due to her taking part in the Lancashire 2050 event in London.

The Committee agreed: That the update be noted.

6 PARKING SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications, presented the Parking Services Annual Report.

Members raised the offer to park in Blackpool for £1 available via the Parking app. It was queried if having this offer exclusively available through the app could be seen as discrimination by some people who did not use the app. It was also noted that in some circumstances those using the app had paid more than at the pay-machines in car parks. Mr Welsh responded that there had been not been any complaints received regarding the offer to park for £1. He added that this offer was only available via the app as it was simpler to reconfigure to allow the offer than re-programming machines in car parks.

It was further stated that in respect of the cost of parking using the app, this should be the same as at machines in car parks and that Mr Welsh would investigate why this had not been the case at the locations highlighted by members.

The possibility of developing an in-house parking app instead of using an external provider was discussed. Mr Welsh informed members that this approach had been undertaken due to the complexity and cost of developing a Blackpool specific app. Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Job Creation, added that the current provider was a nationally established company which provided parking services to a number of councils. This benefited the Council due to the economies of scale they could provide and the technical support available that would otherwise have to exist in-house.

Plans for the installation of Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points for on-street parking bays were raised by the Committee. It was noted that EV charging points were available in Blackpool's indoor car parks, with Mr Welsh stating that plans for the installation of points were not the responsibility of Parking Services but that her would clarify the information and share with Members.

The Committee agreed:

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2022**

1. That the update be noted;
2. That the instances of higher parking cost on the parking app be investigated and details of the outcome be provided to the Committee; and
3. That details of plans for charging points for on-street electric vehicle charging be provided to the Committee.

7 ILLUMINATIONS UPDATE

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications, presented an update on work to deliver the illuminations and future plans.

The Committee noted that the Illuminations remained a popular tourist attraction and welcomed the variety of light displays created. With the addition of the Lightpool festival members queried how the substantial archive of previous illuminations attractions could be used to further generate tourism to Blackpool. Mr Welsh responded that consideration had been given to how pieces from the archive could be displayed, adding that the new Conference Centre at the Winter Gardens provided a floor space that could be utilised.

Members also raised concern that gaps could be created in the illuminations along the promenade due to the tramway extension work taking place. It was suggested that other methods of displaying lights be considered in these areas to prevent the creation of gaps.

The inclusion of the Spitfire Island in future light displays was discussed by the Committee. Members queried if the inclusion of a military themed display was appropriate in a festival of light and if offence could be caused to some visitors. Mr Welsh responded that there had been positive feedback to the plans and noted that Blackpool had historical connections to military aviation. Mr Richard Williams, Production Manager, added that Blackpool had purchased three Spitfire aircraft during the Second World War, and that the display would highlight this link to the town's history.

The use of the £4.5m in Town Fund money was raised, with it being asked what the money would be spent on. Mr Williams explained that this would be used to expand the Illuminations infrastructure off the promenade and into the town. This would allow an expansion of the illuminations and access of more visitors on foot.

The Committee agreed:

1. That the update be noted; and
2. That the Committee be provided will details of how gaps in the Illuminations caused by the tramway extension will be addressed.

8 HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS ANNUAL REPORT

Ms Vikki Piper, Head of Housing, presented the Housing and Homelessness Annual Report. She informed the Committee that significant Levelling-Up work had been taking place and was planned in relation to housing and homelessness. It was also reported that the majority of the housing projects being undertaken were on schedule.

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2022**

In respect of homelessness Ms Piper stated that the pressure on services had grown significantly and was an area of concern. This had been attributed to the ongoing national economic situation including the cost of living crisis.

The Committee discussed the levelling-up work taking place, with Ms Piper reporting that this was focussed on housing work. She informed members that the work with the Department for Levelling-Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) involved two ongoing projects. The first project related to an enforcement pilot of new standards by the Council with support from DLUHC seeking to address exploitation in the local private rented sector and supported housing market improving housing quality and protecting the most vulnerable people in Blackpool.

The second project involved DLUHC support for further economic regeneration that would allow Blackpool's housing stock to match the investments seen into the Town Centre.

Members of the Committee discussed the role of housing in supporting the work of Children's Services in Blackpool's Central Area. It was noted that many of the problems experienced in the area were related to the poor quality housing located there. Ms Piper explained that the Council had recognised the joint working required by services to address the problems faced by children in the Central Area and that Housing Services worked with Children's Services in addressing these.

The Committee considered the impact of house prices on residents, noting that historically rising house prices had been seen as a positive and a driver for further investment. However increasing prices would also mean some properties became unaffordable for Blackpool's residents and first time buyers. Ms Piper explained that Blackpool's housing market was very complex, but that house prices had stabilised since Covid. However increasing rental costs remained an issue. The increase of landlord's costs due to the ongoing cost of living crisis had been passed on to renters. The impact of this was noted as having been heaviest on those living in houses of multiple occupancy (HMO).

Noting recent reports in the media regarding the housing of asylum seekers in Blackpool hotels, the Committee queried the Council's role in their care. Ms Piper responded that those housed in Blackpool would only remain until their asylum claim had been processed, but that responsibility for their care was the responsibility of the Home Office. She also reported that there had been a number of media reports that contained factually incorrect information regarding migrants in Blackpool and that the Council would be seeking to clarify these reports in the future.

The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) was discussed by the Committee with it being noted that details had yet to be finalised. Ms Piper explained that the details of where rough sleepers would be accommodated had yet to be agreed and that this would not be with bed and breakfasts as during the Covid pandemic. She added that these locations would remain private but that the SWEP would be activated for winter 2022 and that it would remain in place until spring 2023.

Funding for homelessness prevention was also outlined for the Committee with Ms Piper

**MINUTES OF TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2022**

reporting that the Council received £600k in Homelessness Prevention Grant and £200k over three years of funding from the Rough Sleeping Initiative. These were important sources of ring fenced revenue however it was noted that further funding from council resources was needed to meet the demand being experienced by services.

The Committee agreed: That the update be noted.

9 SHORT TERM LETTINGS SCRUTINY REVIEW FINAL REPORT

The Committee considered the final report of the Short Term Lettings Scrutiny Review Panel for recommendation to the Executive.

Members welcomed the report but asked that details of the revenue lost through short term lettings failing to pay the Council's change of use fee be added to the final report. It was considered that this information would help highlight the negative impact that unregulated lettings had on communities and Blackpool as a whole.

The Committee agreed:

1. That details of the revenue lost caused by Short term lettings failing to register a change of use with the Council be added to the report; and
2. That, with the amendment outlined above, the Short Term- Lettings Scrutiny Review Final report be agreed and recommended for approval to the Executive.

10 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee considered its Workplan for 2022/2023 and noted the items within.

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee agreed: To note the date of the next meeting as 8 February 2023 at 6.00pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.00 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
John Greenbank, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser
Tel: 01253 477229
E-mail: john.greenbank@blackpool.gov.uk