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MINUTES OF LEVELLING UP SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 4 OCTOBER 2023

Present:

Councillor S Smith (in the Chair)

Councillors

Boughton
P Brookes

Hoyle
Humphreys

Hunter
D Mitchell

D Scott
Wilshaw

In Attendance:

Councillor Jo Farrell, Cabinet member for Levelling -Up

Councillor Paul Galley, Scrutiny Leadership Board

Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Levelling-Up - People,

Councillor Lynn Williams, Cabinet Member for Tourism Antony Lockley, Director of Strategy and Assistant Chief Executive

Nick Gerrard, Growth and Prosperity Programme Director

Vikki Piper, Head of Housing

Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Partnerships

Jodie Stephenson, Democratic Services Senior Advisor

Liz Petch, Consultant In Public Health

Kerry Burrow, Public Health Practitioner (Alcohol and Tobacco)

Megan Walker, Public Health Co-Ordinator (Alcohol and Tobacco)

Shane Faulkner, Senior Business Operations Manager, Blackpool Tobacco Addiction Service

Sophie Lowe, Business Delivery & Quality Manager, Blackpool Tobacco Addiction Service

Adele Shields, Service Lead – Blackpool Tobacco Addiction Service

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Diane Mitchell declared a personal interest in Item 6 'Levelling-Up Housing Update the nature of the interest being that she had rental properties in Blackpool.

2 PUBLIC SPEAKING

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

3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 21 JUNE 2023

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting held on 21 June 2023 be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

4 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

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

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5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the contents of the Council's Forward Plan October 2023 to January 2024, relating to the portfolios of the Cabinet Members whose responsibilities fell within its remit and noted the upcoming items.

6 LEVELLING UP UPDATE

Mr Antony Lockley, Director of Strategy and Assistant Chief Executive and Mr Nick Gerrard, Growth and Prosperity Programme Director gave a detailed update on the Levelling-Up projects for Blackpool.

Mr Lockley advised the Committee that weekly meetings continued with the Department of Levelling-Up Homes and Communities, and praised the consistency of the engagement and support provided.

Mr Gerrard gave an extensive update on the regeneration projects happening within the town. He advised the Committee that 2023 was an exciting year for regeneration, many projects that had been developed in 2017 were in the final stages and had either been launched and open or getting ready for launch.

The Committee was updated on some of the issues that had affected the developments, predominantly with regards to the original budgeted cost increasing owing to the building material costs as a consequence of the length of the time it took to progress the projects from planning stage to development stage and cost price inflation. It was reported that all projects included a contingency budget, but this had not been sufficient in all cases and savings had to be achieved. As a result higher contingency allowances were now being built into future project planning.

Members were assured that the aim was for any savings and delays as a result of circumstances beyond the Council's control to not affect the delivery of the schemes in a noticeable way wherever possible, but that they would affect the way in which the projects were developed.

An engagement event would take place on the 6 and 7 December 2023 in the Houndshell Shopping Centre with regards to regeneration to allow members of the public to ask questions and look at future plans.

Mr Lockley reported that the review of the masterplan for Silicon Sands had commenced and would be completed by December 2023. He advised that the Cyber and Digital project would require working collectively with other businesses and industries within the Lancashire area. The Multiversity aimed to provide a syllabus which would complement those industries.

Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Levelling-up - Place advised the Committee that engagement with Scrutiny was a high priority and recommended that Members be proactive with their questions. He encouraged Members to make contact via email in between meetings if they would like to ask pertinent questions.

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The Committee agreed:

1. To note the progress made following the previous updates in June 2023.
2. To receive regular updates with regards to the regeneration projects.

7 LEVELLING UP - HOUSING UPDATE

Ms Vikki Piper, Head of Housing gave an update on the first stage of the Decent Homes pilot. She explained that the first stage of the pilot centred mostly on reactive cases from complaints received so the results would not indicate a true reflection of full extent of the standard of the properties in Blackpool.

Stage 2 had also been completed but the results of the investigation stage would not be available for some time. Stage 2 had been more proactive with officers knocking on doors, going from street to street, and the evaluation would show a clearer picture of the issues arising, patterns and trends.

Councillor Jo Farrell, Cabinet Member for Levelling-up - People advised the Committee that there was a tenancy support team in place to pick up and support families in need of additional help and advice.

Members were concerned that the new standards could reduce the number of rental properties available in the market, and increase pressure on the homeless service. Ms Piper agreed that this could have long term impact on the number of rental properties in Blackpool however, she reassured Members that whilst the project was in the pilot stages, the impact would be minimal.

If the Decent Homes Standards (DHS) were introduced by Government following the consultation, this would be when enforcement action would be addressed. The pilot should provide landlords with enough information and time to improve the standard of the property prior to the introduction.

In addition to the DHS, Ms Piper advised that the Council had engaged with the Secretary of State in respect of damp and mould reports and actions, both in private rented sector and their own housing stock.

Ms Piper updated Members on the two new housing development sites in Blackpool. Foxhall Village was at the final planning stages and work would commence in the near future and Grange Park site, stage 1, had been successfully let with positive feedback received.

The Committee was advised of Rent Repayment Orders. These orders were available for tenants and Councils to claim back rent for sub-standard properties. The Orders were available but not widely used. The Council intended to use this as part of the enforcement procedure going forward.

The Committee agreed:

1. To note the progress made following the previous update in June 2023.
2. To receive an update upon the Mould and Damp figures in Blackpool.

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8 BLACKPOOL TOBACCO ADDICTION SERVICE

Mr Shane Faulkner, Senior Business Operations Manager – Long Term Conditions, Non-Medical Led Respiratory Specialist Services, Adult Integrated Respiratory Service (AIRS) and Tobacco Dependency Treatment Services (Trust Smokefree Programme Lead) along with Mrs Liz Petch, Consultant In Public Health presented the Blackpool Tobacco Addiction Service performance data to the Committee.

Mr Faulkner acknowledged that despite the successful performance from 2022 and the first half 2023, in order to continue the success the programme would now have to reach out to those perhaps more reluctant to quit or who were not yet ready to quit. A focus was also required on those people who were harder to engage; including people suffering with mental health issues, the LGBTQ community and the various ethnic minority groups in the town.

A new pathway had been developed within the Acute Trust which ensured that all health professionals working with patients who had been diagnosed with health concerns would receive an automatic (opt out) referral to the Tobacco Addiction Service. There was an ambition to ensure that similar pathways were established for Primary Care.

Members were advised that an extensive update report regarding vaping in Blackpool would be presented at the Levelling-Up Scrutiny Committee meeting scheduled for 13 March 2024.

With regards to current currently vaping was not used as a tool to quit, but this could possibly be a consideration for the future. The BTAS currently used nicotine replacement products, along with behaviour change therapy and support.

9 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee considered its Workplan for 2023/2024 and noted the items within.

Members considered Committee's Action Tracker, noting the updates and outstanding items.

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date and time of the next meeting was noted as 8 November 2023 commencing at 6.00pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 8.07 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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