

**MINUTES OF LEVELLING UP SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 24 JANUARY
2024**

Present:

Councillor S Smith (in the Chair)

Councillors

P Brookes
Hoyle

Marshall
B Mitchell

D Scott
Thomas

Wilshaw

In Attendance:

Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration

Carl Carrington, Head of Planning (Quality and Control)

Carolyn Primett, Head of Arts

Peter Legg, Head of Economic and Cultural Services

Judith Mills, Consultant in Public Health (Health Improvement and Adult Public Health)

Kerry Burrow, Public Health Practitioner (Alcohol and Tobacco)

Jodie Stephenson, Democratic Services Senior Advisor

Councillor Jo Farrell, Cabinet Member for Levelling-Up – People

Councillor Mark Smith Cabinet Member for Levelling-Up – Place

Councillor Paul Galley, Chair of the Scrutiny Leadership Board

Tom High, Horizon Services Manager, Delphi Medical

Annie Kerfoot, Head of School for Leadership Management and Lifestyle at Blackpool and the Fylde College

Tina Redford, Artistic Director, LeftCoast

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Lynn Williams, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Tourism, Arts and Culture who was on official Council business.

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

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 8 NOVEMBER 2023

The Committee considered the minutes of the last meeting held on 8 November 2023 and

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requested that the following wording be added:

Item 10, Housing and Homelessness Annual Report, after paragraph 5:

“Ms Vikki Piper, Head of Housing advised that approximately 60 families were being supported with homelessness at that time, Members enquired as to how long the support would last for each individual family.”

Item 10, Housing and Homelessness Annual Report, after paragraph 7:

“Captain (Dr) John Clifton, The Salvation Army advised that he had been informed that Blackpool Council was no longer able to provide financial support for the extended winter provision to provide continual safe sleeping spaces for people who were street homeless during the cold weather. Captain (Dr) Clifton advised that The Salvation Army was dedicated to exploring alternative funding avenues and collaborative approaches to ensure the continuity of winter provision; however, he urged the Council to re-evaluate the funding decision.”

Subject to the amendments, the Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting held on 8 November 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.

Members discussed EX50/2023, Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone and requested a future update on the Blackpool Airport Operations Limited Company with regards to business planning and operational recovery. Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration confirmed that the Company had commissioned an independent review, and an update would be provided to the Committee on completion.

The Committee considered EX51/2023 Blackpool’s Town Deal Programme.

Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Levelling-Up – Place advised that the scheme had been allocated £7.5 million of Towns Fund monies. Blackpool Council would be the scheme promoter and accountable body with the Council’s Enterprise Zone team leading on project delivery. Any shortfall would be generated through the Council, namely Business rates and additional funding streams.

5 FORWARD PLAN

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

6 ARTS AND CULTURE PLAN FOR BLACKPOOL

Ms Carolyn Primett, Head of Arts, Communication and Regeneration, Peter Legg, Head of

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Economic and Cultural Services, Communication and Regeneration, Annie Kerfoot, Head of School for Leadership Management and Lifestyle at Blackpool and The Fylde College and Tina Redford, Artistic Director, LeftCoast presented the detail of the draft Arts and Culture Plan for Blackpool.

Ms Primett provided the Committee with the background and the need for an Arts and Culture Plan for Blackpool. The document would act as a single voice to encourage a cohesive approach with other organisations who shared common goals.

Mr Legg explained that the production of the strategy had relied heavily on co-production with representatives from all arts and culture organisations in the town. A number of stakeholder consultation events had taken place where honest feedback and suggestions had been shared. The outcome from the consultation events would support the creation of the strategy and an action plan.

Mrs Redford advised that the strategy document should be available for publication in spring and the action plan would focus on four main areas and cover the timeframe of 2024 to 2030. The presenters collectively agreed that the actions in the action plan had been given a realistic and achievable target.

Ms Kerfoot advised that strong links to the education sector would be key to build aspiration in the town with an aim of home grown talent and talent retention.

The Committee agreed:

1. To note the progress report;
2. To receive a further update on the Arts and Culture Plan for Blackpool at a future meeting.

7 LEVELLING-UP UPDATE

Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration and Councillor Mark Smith, Cabinet Member for Levelling-Up – Place provided the Committee with a verbal update on Levelling-Up in Blackpool.

Mr Cavill advised the Committee that a decision from central government regarding the town's "Levelling-Up" housing ambitions had progressed much slower than anticipated. The Council held an optimistic view point and was hoping for positive news in the near future.

The Committee was advised that Blackpool Magistrates' Court had been permanently closed following the discovery of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC). Hearings would take place at Preston Magistrates Court in the interim period until the new Courthouse development was completed in 2026.

Mr Cavill updated the Committee on the Town Centre Access Scheme (TCAS), with regards to the Post Office project, he advised that the Council had been working with the developer to support the purchase of the Post office building.

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The Committee also discussed the Business in the Community (BITC), Councillor Mark Smith advised that the Council had established an increase interest in business development from the private sector.

8 ALCOHOL SERVICES AND STIGMA/ALCOHOL DEATHS AND COVID

Ms Judith Mills, Consultant in Public Health (Health Improvement and Adult Public Health), Ms Kerry Burrow, Public Health Practitioner (Alcohol and Tobacco), and Mr Tom High, Horizon Services Manager, Delphi Medical provided an update with regards to the stigma of accessing treatment and impact of increased alcohol consumption during lockdown.

Ms Mills thanked Members for their contribution to the Draft Blackpool Alcohol Prevention and Harm Reduction Strategy 2024-2027.

She advised that nationally, budgets for alcohol services had been depleted over the last 10 years and advised that the previous national strategy had not been developed since 2012.

In addition, Members were advised that historically the drug and alcohol service had been combined, however the decision had been made to separate the two services.

The impact of Covid had increased drinking levels in Blackpool, which had continued after the pandemic ended, and she advised that at this stage it would be too early to evaluate the impact of damage this could have caused in the population.

Mrs Burrow reported on the 'Stigma' attached to Alcohol Services and the barriers that prevented people reaching out for support. She advised that tackling the stigma had been identified as a government priority and that they were waiting for the outcomes as to whether a national campaign would be designed, Mrs Burrow acknowledged that Blackpool had its own unique needs and any campaign adopted or created would be designed to support the needs of the population of Blackpool.

Mr High updated the Committee on the developments within the Alcohol Service:

- The launch of the Lighthouse Alcohol Service.
- Successful blocking of new applications (off-License premises) in the cumulative impact area.
- Being advocates for Minimum Unit Pricing.

He also advised the Committee of the innovative ways in which the service was trying to engage with the hard to reach population, this included the use of a QR code as a tool for people to use anonymously to reach out and receive support. Mr High reported that referrals had increased by 33% and as a consequence there had been an increase of 38% in registrations for the service.

The Committee was advised that at this stage it was too early to see what the impact of the increased drinking following the pandemic had been on Blackpool, however it was noted

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that figures for younger people had not increased.

Members was notified that the service would be using a trauma informed approach with their treatment and they were in the process of developing a Charter Mark for this service with UCLAN.

The Committee agreed:

To receive a further update at the meeting 3 July 2024, the report to include local service data.

9 EMPTY PROPERTY DATA

Mr Carl Carrington, Head of Planning (Quality and Control) provided the Committee with an update on how enforcement was actively reducing the number of empty properties across Blackpool. He provided an explanation with regards to the legal process and the enforcement options available to the Council, but acknowledged that this often lead to a long drawn out process, with some cases lasting in excess of two years.

Mr Carrington advised that the data with regards to empty properties could be broken down into wards to allow Members to monitor properties within their wards.

He explained that the list of short-term empty properties was extremely fluid with cases being closed quickly following investigation and discussions with landlords, however the overall figures for problematic properties remained consistent averaging between 50-70 properties at any one time.

Members were informed that due to lack of resources, the service remained a responsive service relying on complaints from members of the public and internal referrals from other departments, such as housing enforcement. The wider enforcement team would be able to offer support in the future when demand was high.

Members requested additional detail with regards to the type of enforcement actions available to the Council.

Members noted that the additional pressure of the increased number of Airbnb's in Blackpool and explained that this would also require additional resources.

The Committee agreed:

1. To receive mapping data with regards to individual wards to enable Scrutiny Members to investigate ways in which they could support the enforcement team,
2. To received details of enforcement powers in writing following the meeting.

10 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee considered the Scrutiny Workplan Report for 2024/2025 and noted the items within.

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

Members also endorsed the outcomes of the meeting and the suggestions made toward the Draft Alcohol Strategy.

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date and time of the next meeting was noted as Wednesday 13 March 2024 at 6.00pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 8.00 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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