

Report to:

LEVELLING-UP SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Relevant Officer:

Alan Cavill, Director of Tourism and Communications

Date of Meeting:

21 June 2023

TOURISM PERFORMANCE

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To provide the committee with a background to the visitor economy and how performance is assessed.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

2.1 To note the report.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 Background information only.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:

4.1 N/A

5.0 Council priority:

5.1 The relevant Council priority is

- The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool

6.0 Background information

6.1 OVERALL PERFORMANCE

6.1.1 Our tourism performance is measured in a number of ways. Individual attractions, hotels, venues and hospitality businesses use their own bespoke indicators to measure performance whether that be through ticket sales, room occupancy, revenue generation or satisfaction

ratings.

6.1.2 In order to measure the resort-wide impact, Blackpool Council (through its destination marketing arm, VisitBlackpool) uses two distinct methods:

- **The annual STEAM report** (a tool used by many UK destinations) which generates an estimate of the overall number of visitors to Blackpool, and the monthly Visitor Economy Performance Indicator (VEPI) report, which is produced by our own research team and comprises a basket of indicators including footfall, parking and tram usage and inbound rail journeys.
- STEAM is an externally-validated tourism economic impact model that analyses relevant local data including visitor attraction numbers, tourist accommodation bed-stock and occupancy levels, transport usage, attendance at events and levels of visitor expenditure.
- That information is used to create an estimate of the annual value, volume and economic impact broken down into multiple categories including day visitors and overnight stays.
- The annual STEAM report is usually published approximately nine months after the end of the calendar year. Hence, the STEAM report for 2022 should be available in September 2023.
- The last report, covering 2021, illustrated the speed and scale of Blackpool's post-pandemic recovery. It revealed that the resort attracted a record number of almost 19million visitors in 2021 – despite losing the first four months of the year to COVID lockdowns and restrictions
- The total figure of 18.81m was more than double the figure recorded in 2020 when pandemic restrictions on tourism was at the most severe level and 4% higher than the pre-pandemic year of 2019. It reaffirmed Blackpool's place as the UK's most visited seaside destination.
- The report also showed that Blackpool accounted for almost 40% of all visits to Lancashire in 2021. It valued the resort's tourism economy at more than £1.4bn, supporting in excess of 20,000 jobs.
- **The monthly Visitor Economy Performance Indicator (VEPI) report** is produced in-house with contributions from Blackpool Transport, Northern Rail, a selection of visitor attractions and town centre retailers, as well as town centre and promenade footfall which is measured using mobile phone data.
- Given the lag in production of the annual STEAM report, the VEPI reports give more of a "real-time" flavour of how key indicators are performing against previous year.
- Given the additional Bank Holiday in May to mark the King's Coronation, the VEPI indicators for that month will give an early indication of how the tourism industry is performing. On the back of an extended spell of good weather over the final two weeks of May (coinciding with a Bank Holiday Weekend and school holiday), early signs suggest a very positive start to the season with one of our major visitor attractions reporting record

attendance.

6.2 VISITOR ECONOMY 2023

6.2.1 A preview of the year ahead was presented by VisitBlackpool and resort partners at the annual Season Launch event attended by more than 300 tourism businesses at the end of March. The highlights included:

- More than £15m of investment in new attractions including the world's first Gruffalo and Friends Clubhouse which has been opened by Merlin Entertainments on the Golden Mile; a new big cat enclosure at Blackpool Zoo; the return of the award-winning Valhalla thrill ride at Blackpool Pleasure Beach; a new three-tier Ninja assault course at Ascent Trampoline Park and a new multiplex cinema in the town centre featuring one of the country's largest IMAX screens.
- A repeat of the "Only In Blackpool" destination marketing campaign developed in partnership with Merlin Entertainments and other resort partners. The summer campaign will again feature resort "ambassador" Nigel C Gull giving TV viewers a whistle-stop tour of the resort. The marketing campaign, which also includes radio and digital advertising, is a £600k investment by Blackpool Council, Merlin Entertainments and the Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID).
- The planned opening of a new four-star Holiday Inn and Marco Pierre White restaurant; a 70-bedroom extension to the Hampton By Hilton; and a much-enhanced hospitality offer with the summer arrival of a Turtle Bay restaurant and the opening of the newly-regenerated Abingdon Street Market with multiple food and drink concessions.
- The planned return of the annual Switch-On ceremony to the outdoors where the Illuminations will be turned on as part of a free event with music and family entertainment. For the past three years, the Switch-On ceremony has been performed indoors with a limited audience, largely due to COVID restrictions. Further details will be revealed in the weeks ahead.
- Another two-month extension to the Illuminations season with the lights shining from 1 September until 1 January, 2024. As part of the Towns Deal funding, the Illuminations team is working on three brand new installations for the 2023 season which will be unveiled over the coming weeks.
- A packed calendar of free events including the two-day Blackpool Air Show with the Red Arrows performing on both days, as well as Ride The Lights, World Fireworks Championship Blackpool, the award-winning Lightpool Festival, and the return of Christmas By The Sea.
- A vast selection of West End shows and live entertainment at venues including the Winter Gardens, Grand Theatre, and Pleasure Beach, including Six The Musical; Annie; Shrek The Musical; The SpongeBob Musical; and a new production of Hot Ice. Sir Cliff Richard will also mark 60 years since he first performed a summer season in Blackpool with a concert at the Opera House.

6.2.2 The launch event also saw the publication of a free entertainment guide containing hundreds of listings for shows, musicals and concerts running from Easter to the end of the year at numerous venues including the piers and Viva Blackpool.

6.3 BUSINESS TOURISM

6.3.1 Whilst the primary responsibility for marketing Blackpool to leisure tourists sits with VisitBlackpool, business tourism is now managed within MeetBlackpool, a partnership comprising VisitBlackpool, Blackpool Council, the Winter Gardens and various resort partners who have a vested interest in the conference and exhibitions market.

6.3.2 This partnership approach, which was adopted following the opening of the new £30m Conference and Exhibition Centre, is intended to make best use of Council and Winter Gardens resources to attract new and lapsed conferences back to Blackpool in all venues as well as the Winter Gardens. Since its formation a few months ago, MeetBlackpool has:

- Established a Steering Group (chaired by Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communications for Blackpool Council). It meets on a quarterly basis and has representation from the Winter Gardens team, large venues and attractions, and accommodation providers including StayBlackpool. Its key objective is to ensure there is a “One Blackpool” approach to winning conference business.
- Rebranded MeetBlackpool to include a new website and marketing collateral.
- Appointed an external PR company (Davies Tanner) to spearhead communication of the new branding and build awareness within the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) industry through social media, blogs, case studies and press releases.
- Established a new accommodation booking platform for conference delegates via a well-established provider, Convenus.
- Attended (or planning to attend) various conference industry exhibitions including Confex in Leeds and the Meetings Show in London.
- Planned a familiarisation visit to Blackpool for the Association of British Professional Conference Organisers on July 7 and 8, when around 20 conferences bookers will be in resort to experience the new Conference and Exhibition Centre and see some of the significant improvements to the overall business tourism offer.

6.3.3 Over the past 12 months, the new Conference Centre has attracted a significant number of large-scale meetings and exhibitions. These include:

- Conservative Party Spring Conference, March 2022, with 800 delegates and an estimated economic benefit to the resort of more than £1m
- Awakenings annual seminar EXPO in June 2022 with 600 attendees and an economic impact of £160k
- Inner Wheel annual conference in March 2023 with 1,000 delegates and an economic impact of almost £400k

- Society of British Neurological Surgeons – a first for this type of health conference for Blackpool.
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6.3.4 Some of the events already confirmed between June 2023 and June 2024 include:

- Northern Premier Football League AGM and dinner, June 2023 (400 attendees)
- National Association of Retired Police Officers Annual Conference, September 2023 (800 delegates)
- JD Outdoors Annual Conference, October 2023 (450 attendees)
- Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, November 2023 (1,000 attendees)
- Labour Party N-W Conference, November 2023 (700 delegates)
- Federation of Small Businesses Conference and Expo, May 2024 (500 delegates)
- Civil Service Live Annual Conference, June 2024 (2,000 delegates).

6.2 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of Appendices:

7.1 N/A

8.0 Financial considerations:

8.1 N/A

9.0 Legal considerations:

9.1 N/A

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 N/A

11.0 Equalities considerations:

11.1 N/A

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

12.1 N/A

13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:

13.1 N/A

14.0 Background papers:

14.1 N/A