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MINUTES OF SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP BOARD MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 8 MARCH 2023

## Present:

Councillor Mrs Callow JP (in the Chair)

Councillors

Burdess	Jackson	Stansfield
Critchley	Mrs Scott	Walsh

## In Attendance:

Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources  
Mr Mark Golden, Head of Accountancy  
Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism  
Ms Ruth Henshaw, Performance Delivery Officer  
Mrs Sharon Davis, Scrutiny Manager

### 1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

### 2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 12 OCTOBER 2022

The minutes of the last meeting held on 12 October 2022 were signed by the Chair as a true and correct record.

### 3 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE MONITORING AS AT MONTH 9

Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources presented the financial performance monitoring as at Month 9 and advised that the Month 9 data provided the basis for the 2023/2024 Council budget. He noted that the service pressures remained for Children's Social Care and therefore the financial performance information provided for the Service was more detailed. The number of looked after children had continued to reduce however the cost per placement had increased. There had been a rising number of Special Guardianship Orders issued.

It was reported that the staff pay award in 2023/2024 had been much higher than forecasted with a similar award expected in 2024/2025. Non pay inflation and higher interest rates had also placed additional pressures on the Council's budget. The current level of reserves was considered to be healthy with working balances and reserves monitored in close detail. In regards to collection of Council Tax and Business Rates, it was noted that a higher level of collection had been achieved in 2023/2024 than in the previous year.

The summary outlook for the next few years was highlighted with a budget gap of £23.4 million forecast in 2023/2024, reducing to £6.6 million expected in 2024/025 and £4.8 million in 2025/2026.

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The Board referred to the level of income from parking and queried whether the cost of parking in Blackpool was competitive. In response, Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism advised that the Council car parks in Blackpool were cheaper than the private car parks on offer and that offers had been used during the year such as park for £1 in the run up to Christmas to encourage locals to the town and offer a competitive model. Deals were also on offer for hotels and business to allow them to purchase permits and access a quality, well maintained parking service.

Following further discussion, concern was noted that anecdotal evidence suggested that residents were not happy with the cost of parking in the town. It was reported that the app had offered a lower cost of parking at times through offers and that these offers would be extended to people paying for their parking in other ways.

The Committee noted the update.

### **4 COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT (Q1 - Q3 2022/23)**

Ms Ruth Henshaw, Performance Delivery Officer advised that the report covered three quarters of data up until 31 December 2022. As requested previously by the Board additional comparative data had been included in to the report to add context to the performance information.

The Board queried the accuracy of the STEAM data used to provide detail on the number of visitors to the town. In response, Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism advised that STEAM data was used by all destinations to monitor the number of visits and that analysis of data such as levels of hotel occupancy, attendance at events and ticket sales was all used to create the figures. The data was also supported by parking statistics and in-bound rail traffic and was generally accepted nationally as the most reliable data source available.

In response to further questions, Mr Welsh advised that of the 19 million visitors, 2.4 million had been recorded as 'stays' in the town with 16.4 million day visitors. There was concern that the level of 'stays' was low in comparison to the number of day visitors and that more could be done to increase the number of 'stays'.

Mr Welsh advised that holiday accommodation in the town had outperformed the remainder of the UK during the previous year and that demand for good quality accommodation could be seen. It was expected that the additional investment in the town on good quality hotels would increase the number of 'stays' further.

The Board also raised a number of queries for which a response would be provided in writing following the meeting:

- The cost of the event to engage business owners with the Enterprise Zone and the number of attendees.
- The number of jobs created at the Enterprise Zone that had been filled by residents living in FY postcodes.
- Data on the number of young people sustaining the employment that they had been supported into by the Council.
- The data source of the telephone numbers used to carry out the recent residents' survey.

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The Board went on to discuss the concerning GCSE Maths and English results and raised some general concerns regarding education in the town. Further concern was raised regarding young people aged 16-18 years and what could be done to ensure they were fully supported into work or training. It was agreed that both issues would be forwarded to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee for further consideration.

The Board agreed:

1. That a response to the unanswered questions be provided in writing following the meeting.
2. To refer the two issues of concerning education results and young people aged 16-18 requiring support into work to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee for further consideration.

### **5 CHANNEL SHIFT SCRUTINY REVIEW - UPDATE ON RECOMMENDATIONS**

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism presented the update on the implementation of the Channel Shift Scrutiny Review recommendations on behalf of the Council. He noted that good progress had been made to date with good growth in the number of email contacts and improvements to the staff facing intranet. Progress had also been made in the work on digital inclusion, however, further work was still required in developing the overarching brand as set out in the first recommendation. It was also suggested that further work was still required to improve the profile of the Council's wholly-owned companies on the Council's website.

The Board raised concerns regarding the response to phone calls to the Council's Customer Service phone number. In response, Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources advised that the current response rate of 40-50% required improvement and that all routes for improvement were being considered. The importance of the customer interface and communication with members of the public to ensure they were aware of how to do something was highlighted.

The Board noted positively the upcoming launch of the new parks webpage and the feedback on digital inclusion.

The Committee noted the update and that agreed that a further update on the recommendations be provided in September/October 2023.

### **Chairman**

(The meeting ended at 7.01 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:  
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