

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND CABINET MEMBER FOR TOURISM, ARTS AND CULTURE – COUNCILLOR LYNN WILLIAMS

Portfolio areas of responsibility:

- Tourism and marketing services
- Tourism-based regeneration
- Arts and culture
- Illuminations
- Built heritage
- Planning and land use
- Corporate Services (ICT, HR, Customer First, communications)
- Financial management

Introduction

The cabinet member will present the report to Council and report on any key issues.

Theme 1 - Budget 2023/24

Local Authority finances remain challenging with now at least 40 councils reported in the media as declaring or about to formally declare challenges with their financial standing and there are many others who are known to be struggling. In response a Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee has been established to investigate the level of financial distress across local authorities with Blackpool Council being invited to present evidence on this matter in November.

The third external financial monitoring report for the Council for the current financial year was presented to the Executive on 6 November 2023. The key financial headlines for Blackpool Council as at month 5 are as follows:

1. An overall forecast adverse revenue outturn variance of **£4.9 million**, an improvement on earlier forecasts. This includes £6.0 million for Children's Social Care but with some positive trends in residential care placements emerging; £3.5 million for Adults' Social Care commissioning placements and a likely worsening trend; £0.5 million on home-to-school transport demand, offset by £1.6 million 'savings' in treasury management due to some slippage on capital schemes, £1.3 million from other services and a further £2.2 million from budgeted transfers to reserves that are no longer required. Pressures arising from the local government pay award should be offset by a commensurate saving from reducing electricity tariffs.

2. Residual working balances are still positive at **£1.9 million** and whilst this is low, it is significantly improved on the £1 million forecast at month 3.
3. Earmarked revenue reserves at **£28.6 million**.
4. Ongoing work with the Safety Valve Programme of the Department for Education is making significant inroads to the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant's medium-term financial plan, whose deficit should have reduced from £2.8 million to **£1.6 million** by 31 March 2024 and breakeven by 2024/25.
5. The aggregate of profits and losses across the Council's wholly-owned companies forecast at a net loss of **£0.4 million** but improving all the time post-COVID.
6. A budget gap currently forecast in year 1 (2024/25) of the next 3 years' medium-term financial plan of **£22.8 million**, which is being worked on constantly.
7. The new business critical systems of *TechnologyOne Financials* and *Midland HR i-Trent* are now fully live and functionality being employed to improve strategic financial planning whilst delivering processing efficiencies.
8. The backlog of external audits of the Council's statements of accounts is being addressed, with 2020/21's due to be signed off in advance of the next Audit Committee in November and 2021/22's expected to be approved by March 2024.

Considering the financial challenges being faced by the Local Government sector, the Council's financial position continues to be difficult but relatively stable. With further demographic and inflationary pressures expected over the coming years, we continue to press for recognition of these extra costs in future funding settlements.

Theme 2 - Showtown – Museum of Fun and Entertainment

Showtown - Blackpool's first museum which celebrates the development of tourism through popular entertainment including Blackpool Illuminations, the Seafront and Promenade, Circus, Magic, Popular Dance and Performance is set to open its doors to the public in March 2024.

The museum site is now visibly starting to take its final form, with set works and installation of audio visual and interactive displays due for completion at the end of November 2023.

Collections and loan installations will take place in December through to January including loans from the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection.

Showtown will create 40 jobs in its first year and 20 volunteering opportunities offering over 300 volunteer days per year. Additionally, Showtown is expected to attract approximately 200,000 visitors per year, generating £14.65 million net additional visitor expenditure for the local economy and providing life-enhancing opportunities for learning, engagement and employment.

Identification, interviewing and auditioning of the opening Cast and Crew and management team commences next month. There is an interactive programme of recruitment aimed to attract and retain emerging creatives and strong business and commercial acumen to the team, with suitable emerging induction, training and development activities.

Showtown will be operated by the newly-approved charity, the Blackpool Heritage and Museum Trust, with existing Blackpool Council Heritage Team, Learning and Engagement Team and Marketing Team colleagues aiming to be TUPE'd across to the new Trust for 1 January 2024. Any further new colleagues will commence in role directly with the Blackpool Heritage and Museum Trust.

Showtown's pre-opening marketing activity commences whilst BBC Strictly Comes Dancing is in town, followed by a heavy pre-opening campaign from January 2024 working with Visit Blackpool, local and regional partners as well as national profile for launch. A series of soft opening events will take place in the fortnight directly preceding opening, and Showtown will open to visitors on Friday 15 March 2024 ahead of Easter and prepared for our first full season.

General questions / comments

Councillors will have the opportunity to raise questions / comments on any matter in the Cabinet Member's portfolio.