

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: Devolution

The desire for political decisions to be made as close as possible to the communities they affect has increasingly been a theme of political discussion in recent times. A constant theme of political life in Blackpool has been the need for greater local autonomy to recognise our particular issues. Since Blackpool became a Unitary Council in 1998 we have been able to control our own destiny, leading to over £2bn of investment in regenerating our town and delivering priorities which matter to local people. Now, with the passing of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act in October 2023, we have an opportunity to access some of the economic, social and environmental benefits open to other places with devolution deals and take back power from central Government by joining a Combined County Authority.

By seeking opportunities to work together across areas such as Trade and Investment, Skills, Transport, Net Zero and Climate Change, Digital and Cyber, Culture and Tourism and Housing and Land, we will be well placed to achieve better outcomes for the residents of Blackpool. These priorities are underpinned by principles such as collaborative working, ensuring that we meet our diversity and inclusion objectives whilst reducing inequalities and seeking openness and transparency in decision-making. More practically, agreeing to join a Combined County

Authority would boost government funding, give us powers build affordable homes and to drive regeneration.

The consultation on our proposals launched countywide on 1 December 2023 and continued until 26 January. At the time of writing, I am pleased to say that the number of responses from Blackpool residents is amongst the highest in the county, reflecting the level of local interest in this key issue for our future. To supplement the online and hard copy consultation exercise, we held a public engagement event on 16 January at Central Library and a business engagement event on 26 January.

I would urge those of you reading this prior to the consultation deadline who have not yet responded to make your views heard by visiting www.lancashiredevolution.co.uk and completing the survey. The website will continue to host information about the proposals after the consultation deadline and the findings of the exercise will be communicated through all appropriate channels as soon as they are available.

We must and will pay close attention to the findings of the consultation as we look to put in place arrangements which work for the good of Blackpool and of Lancashire. The Council meeting in March will be an opportunity for us to debate the comments made and issues raised, which will be carefully considered as part of the process of preparing the final report looking at a decision to proceed.

Should all the necessary approvals be given, the Combined County Authority would be established in shadow form in Spring 2024, with formal establishment from Autumn 2024 onwards. However, we would see this not as an end point, but as the first stage in the journey. We would continue to pursue further powers and funding in line with our priorities so that we can bring decision-making ever closer to those with most to gain – our residents and businesses.

Theme 2 - Tourism

The scale of Blackpool's post-pandemic recovery has been revealed in new tourism figures, which show that the annual number of visitors in 2022 surged past 20 million. The annual STEAM (Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor) report, which analyses data from tourism and hospitality businesses, shows that the resort attracted a further 1.5 million visitors to what was a record year in 2021. STEAM is a visitor estimation model used by many Destinations Management Organisations in the UK. Blackpool's total figure of 20.33 million is more than double the figure recorded in 2020 when pandemic restrictions on tourism were at their most severe and is 12% higher than the pre-pandemic year of 2019. Across Lancashire as a

whole, the STEAM analysis shows that visitor numbers are showing strong recovery across all districts but have not yet reached pre-pandemic levels. The report shows that Blackpool accounted for more than 30% of all visits to the county in 2022 and values the resort's tourism economy at more than £1.7 billion compared to £1.4 billion in 2021, supporting in excess of 22,000 jobs.

The gains made during 2022 were fuelled by the return of large-scale events such as the Air Show Weekend, another two-month extension of the autumn Illuminations season and an expansion of the hugely successful Christmas By The Sea village. There was also a £1 million investment in a multi-media marketing campaign featuring a new TV ad starring resort ambassador, Nigel C Gull, a seagull puppet voiced by actor and comedian Johnny Vegas. The 2023 Christmas By The Sea offer has received widespread national media coverage since launching in mid-November and Blackpool has been repeatedly rated as one of the UK's most attractive winter destinations, beaten only by London and Edinburgh in one national survey. The village has again attracted visitors from across the region and was extended into the first week of January 2024 to align with many schools not reopening until 8 January. Overall visitor numbers for 2023 will be published in late autumn, 2024.

VisitBlackpool has unveiled a new destination guide for 2024 highlighting a dazzling programme of events, shows and attractions for the year ahead. The cover star of this year's guide is the famous Mirror Ball, the world's biggest of its kind. It has benefited from an extensive makeover that included replacement of the 47,000 mirror tiles and new lighting technology. The guide turns the spotlight on some of the faces behind the world-famous Blackpool Illuminations, including international designers Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen and Dr Chila Kumari Singh Burman, MBE and features some of the amazing installations that turn the Promenade into a sea of light during the autumn and winter months. Illustrated with stunning photography, the guide celebrates a very special milestone – the 85th anniversary of the Opera House in the Winter Gardens. It charts the star-studded history of a majestic theatre that has hosted an extraordinary cast of showbiz greats down the years including Charlie Chaplin, Frank Sinatra, Miley Cyrus, Lady Gaga, Bette Midler, Morecambe and Wise – and many more.

The award-winning Lightpool Festival returned for October half-term with an exciting, free-to-see programme of light installations, 3D projection shows, an art trail and live performance. The festival, which ran from 20th - 28th October, included world premieres and installations never before seen in the UK, including artworks from Australia, France, the Netherlands and Spain. It once again attracted a large number of residents as well as visitors from across the country. The trail featured larger-than-life jellyfish (shown in a five-minute slot on The One Show on BBC1 on festival opening night), a field of fireflies alongside the Cenotaph, a giant ball of wool made up

of neon yarn on the roof of the Blackpool Church and an exclusive preview of designer Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen's first digital installation. The Blackpool Tower building saw an alien-like "invasion" with giant tentacles seemingly breaking through the ballroom roof along with newly-commissioned 3D projection shows. The Tower Ballroom also hosted a performance of Carnival Magic with giant illuminated puppets played out to a capacity audience. The light festival is the only one in the UK to be a part of the Arts Council's National Portfolio. The Arts Council has just agreed to extend the investment programme for all of its NPO organisations (also including the Grundy), ensuring funding through to March 2027.

Tickets are now on sale for Blackpool's newest attraction, Showtown, after the long-awaited opening date was set for 15th March. Showtown, which is the resort's first museum, will bring a world-class interactive attraction for families to enjoy, celebrating the seaside, circus, magic, show, dance and Blackpool's world-famous illuminations over a series of six interactive exhibition zones. Visitors will also have a chance to get up close and personal with the entertainers who helped put Blackpool on the map, including the comedians, dancers, acrobats and characters who turned the resort into the home of show business. Available from the official Showtown website, tickets cost £15 for adults and £11.50 for children. Tickets are valid for a whole year, meaning visitors are welcome to return as many times as they like. Blackpool residents who pay Council Tax to Blackpool Council will also be able to get a free ticket, giving them and their family full access to the museum's exhibitions and events, as well as family-friendly facilities. Discounted tickets are also available for students and seniors and carers can go free. Showtown will also offer free trips for local schools as part of its wider education and engagement programmes.

General questions / comments

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