

<h1>Agenda Item 4</h1>	
Report to:	Blackpool Town Deal Board
Subject :	Communications and Community Engagement
Relevant Officer:	Nick Gerrard, Growth and Prosperity Programme Director
Date of Meeting:	27/03/2020

Communications and Community Engagement

1. Purpose of the report

To enable the Board to consider agree its core message and its approach to community engagement and the scope of a proposed consultancy brief.

2. Recommendations

- For the Board to comment on and agree the core message regarding its purpose as set out in Appendix A.
- For the Board to comment on the proposed approach to community engagement and in particular the practicalities of timing in the light of the measures restricting personal contact as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak;
- For the Council, in consultation with the Board’s community representatives to develop and commission a brief to reflect the approach agreed.

2. Background

As reported to Board on February 28th two matters were emphasised:

- (i) For there to be a **clear core message** to articulate the role and purpose of the Town Board in developing a Town Investment Plan;
- (ii) That **community engagement** is an integral part of the process of developing proposals and the Town Investment Plan.

Annex A contains a draft core message for the Board to comment on and agree. It is derived from the other documents on the last agenda and this one.

Community Engagement requires the establishment of strong processes which give a voice to local residents and key stakeholders, allowing them to genuinely influence the content of proposals. In this way, the process of community engagement seeks to connect people directly to the activity being undertaken, providing a firm basis for stakeholders to make their views known to influence plans to enable the town to thrive and prosper.

To be effective, engagement needs to take place at the earliest opportunity in the development of the proposals, striking a balance between starting with a blank sheet of paper and blue-sky thinking, and evidence-based propositions which initial work has demonstrated

could be feasible.

Whilst significant recent engagement work has already been undertaken by both BITC to develop the Town Prospectus and the Council (see Appendix B), this now needs to be built on to shape the Town Investment Plan although it is recognised that depending on the Government's timescales for the Town Investment Plan process, if these are maintained (requiring a submission by summer) the ability to engage effectively will be significantly curtailed until the restrictive measures as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic are lifted.

However, if the timescales for submission do not change then it is proposed to adopt the approach set out below when the restrictions are lifted and adapted as necessary (by which time the resources may have been secured from the Town Deal) as this is likely to be an ongoing process with the focus not solely being on Town Deal funds.

The guidance is clear that effective community engagement sits at the heart of this process. The value of stakeholder input comes from the different perspectives and life experiences of our town which participants hold. In this case, it is mystery shopping, market research, and place-shaping rolled into one.

1.1 Principles

Key considerations include:

1. The need to **maximise the number of people engaged**. This is a key part of the logic underpinning the process – if people aren't engaged they can't shape the projects and will inevitably feel disconnected from the final result.
2. The need to **communicate with residents and other stakeholders throughout and beyond the investment being undertaken**. Time has passed since the initial engagement work, and those involved will not necessarily relate the Town Investment Plan to this and subsequent activity without a clear brand and message helping them to recall the process.
3. **Giving people the ability and tools to get involved in a way which works for them**. This will involve a variety of different engagement techniques, both online and offline, with different levels of support. Community capacity building support may be required to help some communities engage.
4. **The development of community-level expertise**. Linked to the above, there is a need to develop the skills of those local residents who will be involved on an ongoing basis. There is some national support planned to facilitate learning between towns, and helping residents in different towns learn from each other.
5. **A clear and transparent process for considering the views submitted**. Any engagement activity will involve contrasting viewpoints and expectations. A clear process will help people understand how contradictions are resolved, and provide a mechanism to feed back the rationale for why projects are or aren't being taken

forward.

6. **Ongoing involvement.** Whilst some stakeholders will be comfortable with a one-time engagement exercise, others could and should be involved in shaping the detail, providing links back to the wider community are maintained.
7. **Incorporating views gathered via other mechanisms** - MHCLG are running their own engagement exercise to gather views via the **#mytown campaign** and corresponding comments on social media, and these need to be given equal weight to views gathered in-house.

The Board's community representatives will be crucial in shaping the work with an ongoing role to advocate and champion these views as the data gathering processes and conversations take place for completing the Investment Plan.

3.2 Mechanisms

In order to deliver against the principles listed above, a mix of tools will be needed. Ideally these would be developed and agreed by local people, and whilst time is short, the right consultant will be able to quickly review evidence on mechanisms that work locally and involve key players in developing suitable approaches.

These may include:

- **Online mechanisms**, such as: forum/comment discussions; social media campaigns; surveys and facilitated communities. Several tools exist to facilitate these e.g. [Engagement HQ](#) by Bang The Table or [Citizen Space](#) by Delib – and many consultants will already have access to these tools to quickly set up community discussions
- **Offline mechanisms**, including: establishment of user/interest groups, or outreach such as events, open days, street surveys, roadshows, world café-format discussions, and focus groups. These should use both existing resident and other interest groups, and establish other spaces for discussion. Potentially, more innovative tools could be used. Any proposal should include consideration of the support needed to continue these engagement mechanisms beyond the development period of the Investment Plan. The Council is about to commission a resident's telephone survey which could also be used, building on work last undertaken in 2014.

The Council's leadership team has committed to extending the use of "co-production" principles to projects where there is a genuine opportunity to build projects from the bottom up with stakeholders. Co-production is a long-term commitment which requires a trusting relationship between both parties, with a genuine two way flow of information, listening and reflection, and not a bolt-on to be used where projects are shovel-ready. It is incompatible with tight externally-imposed deadlines. Any external organisation should be asked to consider how a co-production approach could be integrated into the Investment plan beyond the submission date deadline, and how it would genuinely influence the activity to be delivered on the ground.

Stakeholders

It will be important to engage all local stakeholders in developing the right mix of tools, and that the final approach blends a mix of relatively light touch mechanisms to achieve good reach into the population as a whole, and some deeper engagement techniques to encourage knowledge development and buy-in. There also needs to be a clear pathway identified to maintain future involvement.

In this context, Stakeholders are any individuals and organisations with a significant interest in what happens in the town centre. Primarily local residents and resident groups, businesses, and third sector organisations, they also include people and organisations beyond Blackpool which nevertheless have an interest in the health of the town centre. Whilst the views of local people and businesses are of paramount importance in this process, the lifeblood of Blackpool remains its visitor economy and it will be necessary for us to develop the Investment Plan with awareness of trends and demands of people beyond our borders.

Protected Characteristics

The needs of groups with protected characteristics should also be considered paramount. For example, previous town centre research in Blackpool conducted by telephone identified that significant numbers of older people with more limited mobility were unable to use the town centre as frequently or extensively as they would like – their views could affect the final design of the interventions.

This is particularly important in the current context of the covid-19 pandemic. Although the picture is changing, the current voluntary restrictions on face-to-face contact and social activities would preclude public engagement work. Online substitutes are possible but would ideally only be used as part of a wider suite of activity ensuring that all groups, including those vulnerable to covid-19, could be engaged.

Appendix A: Draft Core Message

Blackpool Town Deal Board

1. In 2019 the Government established the £3.6 billion Towns Fund to enable towns to address growth constraints.
2. The Government launched 3 competitive bidding exercises against the Towns Fund and Blackpool has successfully got through the first stages of each and is now in the process of finalising its bids for:
 - **Future High Streets Fund (FHSF)** – up to £25m for town centre regeneration
 - **High Street Heritage Action Zone (HAZ)** - £600,000 for the Winter Gardens and Grand Theatre
 - **Town Deal** – up to £25m to help to increase economic growth with a focus on regeneration, improved transport, better broadband connectivity, skills and culture across the whole town.
3. For the Town Deal the Government required each town to establish a **Town Deal Board** with 3 tasks:
 - Develop and agree an evidenced based Town Investment Plan
 - Develop a clear programme of interventions
 - Coordinate resources and influence stakeholders
4. In terms of membership, Government said Town Deal Boards must include:
 - The Council
 - Our two Members of Parliament
 - Local businesses and investors
 - Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
 - Communities: Boards should draw on the local knowledge and insight that communities can provide on the barriers to driving local growth and productivity. It is expected this would be achieved by including community representatives from prominent local civic and faith organisations
 - Other key bodies
5. Blackpool **Town Deal Board** has been established with 20 Members and is chaired by Paul Smith of Business in the Community. Its terms of reference, membership and meeting papers are available on the Blackpool Council website [\(link to be inserted\)](#)
6. In view of the extensive work already undertaken by the **Blackpool Pride of Place Partnership** (Business in the Community, The Council and the Lancashire LEP) and the production of the **Blackpool Town Prospectus** in 2018, Blackpool is at the front of the queue for securing a Town Deal.

- 7.** The Blackpool Town Deal Board is well on with developing its Town Investment Plan which will be synchronised with the refreshed Blackpool Town Prospectus which provides the strategic umbrella to achieve the Town's ambitions.
- 8.** The Town Investment Plan will:
 - include all of the major investments underway in Blackpool, and
 - those investments and policy changes that are required to deliver the strategic ambitions set out in the Town Prospectus.
 - It will not be limited to the current funding available through the Town Deal, the Future High Streets Fund or the High Street Heritage Action Zone but will provide the strategic context for those and any other funding sources that become available including private investment.

Appendix B: Recent Engagement Activity

Both the Council and Business in the Community have undertaken substantial engagement and research directly on this matter or on other topics of relevance. The below includes details of activity undertaken **since 2017**.

1. The Council

The most extensive Council activity undertaken is the **Rolling Visitor Survey** administered by the Council's in-house research team Infusion Research, which has explored the behaviours, perceptions and attitudes of visitors from outside the town on a monthly basis since 2017. The data gathered includes the potential to analyse data specifically on town centre visitors, as opposed to people visiting any part of Blackpool for any reason.

Engagement on resident views in particular of retail and the town centre offer have been extensive recently including commissioned studies and surveys including the **WYG Retail and Leisure Study** (June 2018), and the **General Household Survey** (May 2018 – update planned in 2020).

A key requirement of the WYG Study (2018) entailed the detailed understanding of the local community shopping behaviour in respect of both convenience and comparison goods. To this end, WYG commissioned specialist market researchers NEMS to undertake a telephone survey of households to identify consumers' habits and preferences in Blackpool. In street surveys were also undertaken by NEMS Market Research in Blackpool town centre. The purpose of the surveys was to provide an insight into the views and behaviours of customers, residents and visitors in relation to their visits to Blackpool town centre.

A survey of 1,150 households was undertaken in October 2017, which asked respondents 55 questions relating to their retail and leisure habits. Typical questions were around people's opinions on "Measures to Improve the Centre" and what they perceived as being "the biggest Weakness of the Town Centres". Views on the Night Time Economy were also queried.

On the 27th November 2019, the **Glasshouse** organisation hosted a Blackpool community led design event in the Winter Gardens entitled "Reconfiguring the High Street" which was focused on Blackpool's town centre regeneration plans.

On the 27th February 2020, in conjunction with the **Winter Gardens Heritage Open Day event**, a local community engagement event was held to discuss both Future High Street Fund (FHSF) proposals, Towns Fund and also the Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) proposals in the town. Joint working on these schemes is essential. Trained field workers were employed to gather feedback and people were encouraged to write comments on "sticky notes". Overarching feedback was directly in line with the interventions being proposed for funding by the Future High Street Fund Shadow Board with examples including:

Encouraging “Living over the shop” initiatives	Initiatives that will encourage more independent shops
Attempt to increase levels of residential to increase footfall and animate the evening economy	A dedicated Blackpool gift card to encourage local spend and footfall welcomed
Provision of additional free Wi-Fi	To improve the Abingdon Street market offer including a food market and potential for specialist markets in St Johns square
Additional green space /improved streetscape	To acquire and regenerate the post office – with retail and hotel referred to as key interests

The FHSF Board specifically recognise that engagement with young people in Blackpool is essential and discussions are underway to include an engagement activity with Blackpool and The Fylde College students, at both FE and HE level. This is planned to be undertaken in April but will now have to be undertaken virtually owing to the pandemic.

2. Business in The Community

From July 2015, Business in the Community had a Business Connector on the ground in Blackpool, spending twelve months working with the three sectors to understand the issues around what was driving deprivation – and how one might bring together the best of the three sectors, to help unlock the collective strengths to help communities become more sustainable. During this time, a group of leaders came together to moot the idea of national government being lobbied to partner with Blackpool and work strategically on social and economic regeneration.

Subsequently, The Blackpool Pride of Place Partnership Board was created in February 2017, designed to be a cross sector partnership of Fylde Coast civic leaders who would come together to promote economic development and tackle some of the area's challenges. Throughout the following nine months, engagement continued along the Fylde Coast, with communities, businesses, voluntary sector organisations, residents and public sector bodies. The Blackpool Pride of Place Partnership Board met formally for the first time in November 2017.

In January 2018, it ran a Tourism Strategy Day (facilitated by PwC) which was chaired by Peter Norris (Virgin Chairman). It was convened in Blackpool and brought together the best from the three sectors locally and nationally, utilising the inputs and outputs to inform the strategic plan being created. The Pride of Place then spent the following three months pulling together the knowledge, information and feedback gathered since 2015 and a Strategic Plan was signed off by the Pride of Place Board in April 2018.

To help evolve its Strategic Plan and Vision, a survey was launched in the local paper (and online) in July 2018, with feedback and answers feeding into a Blackpool Engagement Day, which took place using a ‘World Café’ style event, facilitated professionally by ‘The Connectives’, a Social Enterprise who specialise in this work. The morning session was for the

voluntary, public and business sectors, and the afternoon session was for the general public – both were fully attended.

The Town Prospectus – An Agenda for Action, was completed in November 2018 and has been used as a ‘calling card’ by the Pride of Place partnership to highlight our campaign that; we’re ready, organised and have a plan, and want to enter into a partnership with national government to work with us on our social and economic plan. The Pride of Place partnership has spent considerable time lobbying national government for Blackpool to be the second ‘Town Deal’ after Grimsby.

In addition to preparing a Town Prospectus in November 2018, the Pride of Place partnership has:

Escalated national government focus on Blackpool with;

- a House of Lords Committee on regenerating seaside towns in the Lords and;
- a review of the impact of national housing policy on the inner area

And locally;

- launched The Fylde Coast Responsible Business Network which is providing real help in schools and getting long-term unemployed people back into work
- Supported two successful funding bids for the Blackpool Museum
- Created a community focus on Claremont
- Supported a successful bid for funding from National Lottery Community Fund for the Magic Club, and
- Helped attract Homes England funding for ‘urban planning design’ for Claremont & Revoe (with young people at the heart of this)
- Gained the support of HRH the Prince of Wales for the development of Fleetwood Hospital as one of his 7 projects in his 70th year.

The partnership now has a strong bond between the public, private and voluntary sectors with a passion and belief that we can make a difference to Blackpool’s future.

The partnership identified three priorities for 2019 which were to:

1. seek a ‘town deal’ with national government
2. ensure that the Fylde Coast Responsible Business Network is a force for good, and
3. begin a ‘hearts and minds’ campaign to bring all of Blackpool along with us

In 2019, the Pride of Place partnership;

- Continued to lobby national government for a joint approach to tackling Blackpool’s challenges and supporting its development through a ‘town deal’
- Received positive responses to the House of Lords regenerating seaside towns recommendations, including the recent great news that Blackpool has been successful the second round of the Government’s ‘Towns Fund’, ‘Future High Streets Fund’ and ‘Heritage Action Zone Fund’
- Facilitated a successful workshop for Blackpool to bid for the Future High Streets Fund

- Provided business support to school children through road shows, career events and targeted engagement via the Responsible Business Network
- Convened a group of local ambassadors in Blackpool for a 'hearts and minds' campaign
- Launched our national 'Born and Bred' alumni network with a dinner at Guildhall in London, where we gained the support of attendees to champion the town and support the work of the Pride of Place partnership
- Supported the Council on Inward Investment by creating a sounding board for their Business Investment Marketing
- Created Blackpool's first Tech Hub
- Supported the Council to ensure the sub-sea cable gives Blackpool an economic opportunity
- Ran a Seeing is Believing visit for influential Alumni in October, led by John Simpson CBE and Sir Andrew Parmley
- Held a Housing Strategy session in London with experts to refine the proposition to national government

In 2020, the Partnership has identified two priorities;

1. Seek and deliver a 'Town Deal' with national government
2. Develop the economic opportunity for the trans-atlantic cable

Additional reading

1. [Latest update on Grimsby and their Town Deal](#)