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Annual scrutiny report

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Blackpool Council scrutiny annual report 2019/2020

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Introduction

There has never been a more exciting or busier time for scrutiny at Blackpool than the last municipal year, with more policy development input and ongoing scrutiny reviews than ever. Each of the committees has been working towards achieving outcomes, considering how impact can be determined and championing improvement. The achievements of Scrutiny Members in 2019/2020 are set out in this report.

The impact of Covid-19 was keenly felt on scrutiny work in March 2020 and all ongoing work was temporarily suspended in light of the necessary restrictions put in place.

Scrutiny Leadership Board

The Scrutiny Leadership Board was established at Annual Council in 2019 with Councillor Mrs Maxine Callow appointed to the new position of Chair of the Scrutiny Leadership Board. The aim of the Board and the position being to lead the scrutiny function and drive forward the improvements identified.

The impact of the Scrutiny Leadership Board can already be seen with improvement made to the relationship between the Executive and Scrutiny Members. This has culminated in the revision of the Executive/Scrutiny Protocol which sets out the expectations for all Members involved in Scrutiny and on the Executive.

The Leadership Board has also proved key in co-ordinating the work of the three scrutiny committees. Due to the cross-cutting nature of many of the issues considered by scrutiny, the Board has ensured that duplication of work is prevented and that the Chairs and Vice Chairs of each committee work together to achieve outcomes.

Key pieces of work

- The Channel Shift Scrutiny Review was established in November 2019 and is ongoing. A thorough approach is being taken with a focus on increasing resilience and targeting social isolation. The scope will be reviewed in light of Covid-19.
- As a result of scrutiny input into the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy development, the way in which the Parks Team was organised was completely changed. The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy was reviewed 12 months after its implementation by the Scrutiny Leadership Board and will continue to be looked at on a regular basis. The Leadership Board felt that the Strategy did not sufficiently reference blue infrastructure and has requested that further work be undertaken in developing the 'blue' aspect. It was also suggested that additional work was required to engage with businesses.

Focus point: Scrutiny and social media

The board met with Council Officers to discuss how different methods could be used to promote scrutiny to the wider public and improve engagement in scrutiny activity. Work is ongoing to determine how best to use social media to both gather intel for consideration by Members and also promote the work of scrutiny to the wider public.

Informal scrutiny leadership board

Whilst also meeting formally, the Scrutiny Leadership Board also meets informally on a regular basis to gather information from executive members and senior officers and work on building relationships. The informal meetings also give the chairs and vice chairs a positive opportunity to discuss the work of their committees and reflect on where improvements can be made.

Overall, the work of the Scrutiny Leadership Board both formally and informally has been essential in driving forward the improvements made to Scrutiny at Blackpool in 2019/2020.

Future focus

An evaluation of the budget scrutiny process with the aim of making improvements for 2020/2021 will be undertaken. Members of the Budget Scrutiny Panel have been asked to complete a questionnaire to identify what went well and where improvements could be made. Executive member and director input will also be sought to assist in ensuring Budget Scrutiny is as effective as possible and adds the most value in the future.

Future policy development work identified:

- Tree strategy

Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee

The Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee has been setting the standard for Scrutiny at Blackpool in 2019/2020. The engagement with external organisations including the Fylde Coast Clinical Commissioning Groups, Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust has significantly improved which has resulted in improved reporting from the organisations and involvement in scrutiny reviews. NHS Service redesigns are also being communicated to Members more efficiently for input.

The committee has also been focussed on improving engagement with community and third sector groups and has facilitated a high level of involvement from a variety of groups when carrying out its work on mental health services.

Focus point: Mental health services

BBC North West Tonight attended the Committee in 2019 to film the special meeting held to review mental health service provision in Blackpool resulting in a two day report on the news programme. The local press has also keenly reported the work of the committee in relation to both mental health services and many other items.

The committee has been focussed on holding NHS leaders and commissioners to account on the provision of mental health services. Significant impact has been made as a result of the committee's work on engagement of the main providers with wider partners and the gaps in service provision have been widely acknowledged resulting in the introduction of a new crisis café amongst other services.

Key pieces of work

- The Healthy Weight Scrutiny Panel carried out an 'in a day' review of Healthy Weight and the ongoing work to ensure both children and adults engaged in healthy eating and healthy lifestyles. The review agreed ten recommendations, which were agreed by the Executive including writing to schools to ensure they understood the importance of meeting the school food standards and that the Council consider the feasibility of providing free gym access to 11-18 year olds. The Committee will be monitoring the implementation of these recommendations and will measure the impact in due course.
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- The committee has been very active in carrying out workshops with NHS organisations on service redesign. Meetings have been held to consider Head, Neck and Vascular Services, Stroke Improvement and Renal Dialysis Services.
- Key issues considered by the committee include Smoking Cessation, Fulfilling Lives, the CQC inspection of Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Fylde Coast Clinical Commissioning Group Performance.

Measuring the impact

In November 2018, the Committee carried out a scrutiny review on Whole Systems Transfers of Care, the recommendations of which were approved by the Executive in early 2019. Throughout 2019/2020 the Committee has been holding to account responsible officers for ensuring the recommendations have been implemented.

To take this one step further, a piece of work was commissioned from the Corporate Delivery Unit to measure the impact of the recommendations of that review. The review was delayed by Covid-19 and will be completed as soon as possible in 2020/2021.

Joint integrated care system health scrutiny committee

Blackpool Council, in collaboration with Lancashire County Council, Cumbria County Council and Blackburn with Darwen Council has established a joint scrutiny committee to review issues relating to the South Cumbria and Lancashire Integrated Care System. The committee is yet to meet but it will focus on issues affecting the whole system collectively.

Policy development input:

During 2019/2020 the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee has considered and contributed to:

- Drug Strategy
- Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy

Future work identified includes reviews on supported housing and drug related deaths as well as a look at infant mortality in Blackpool and maternity services. Work planning for the year will be carried out in July 2020 and will be reviewed in light

Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee

The focus of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee has been very much on Children's Social Care Improvement due to the outcome of the Ofsted inspection. However, there have been challenges in ensuring the right topics in this area are presented to the committee for review.

This significant and complex area has generated much involvement from Committee Members but despite this only one review has been undertaken outside of the Committee setting. It has been important for Members to gather a deeper understanding and thorough overview of this complicated topic. Training has therefore been provided for Members on a variety of services which fall within the remit of the Committee to improve knowledge levels, namely:

- Education Landscape of Blackpool
- Children's Services Departmental Briefing
- Financial Scrutiny

Training was also scheduled on children's scrutiny which was postponed due to Covid-19.

Key pieces of work

- A working group made up of members of the committee undertook an in-depth review of Inclusion in education which considered the issues faced by parents of children requiring an in-year school place, schools' admissions procedures that aim to ensure pupils are offered a suitable place in a timely manner and the associated impact on the number of children being placed within the Pupil Referral Unit. The working group is in the process of agreeing its final recommendations and will submit its report to the executive as soon as possible.

Connecting with our young people

The committee recognises the importance of incorporating the voice of our children and is excited to be holding a special meeting with young people as the focus. The meeting was originally scheduled to be held in May 2020, but was delayed due to Covid-19. It will be rescheduled as soon as possible and will provide the opportunity for Members to hear about the fantastic ventures going on across the town, directly from those impacted the most and gather the views of children and young people of the services provided by the council.

Working with our partners

The committee identified the important impact of the council's partners on children and young people within Blackpool and as such has maintained a focus on monitoring the new Pan-Lancashire safeguarding partnership arrangements implemented in September 2019. Members have worked closely with the Independent Scrutineer to receive an overview of the arrangements as they have developed and have determined to continue this critical-watch role over the coming year.

Holding key partners to account will be a priority for the committee going forward, as members recognise that the changes required to ensure continued improvement for our children and young people require a committed and coordinated approach from the council and its partner agencies.

Focus point: Budget monitoring

A new and significant function of the committee over 2019/2020 has been the introduction of financial management monitoring of the services that fall under the remit of the committee, including holding relevant budget holders to account. With the major budget implications associated with the improvement journey of Children's Social Care, Members have been developing their ability to scrutinise financial data and question officers and executive members on their budgetary decisions and future financial planning. The committee is keen to develop its role in scrutiny of the budget even further and is considering ways in which this can be done.

Co-Opted Members

The Committee was delighted to welcome two new co-opted members this year:

- Ms Helen Sage joined the committee as diocesan co-opted member and brought a wealth of experience from her employment as advisor to high schools and academies within the Blackburn Diocese.
- Dr Elaine Allen joined the committee as Roman Catholic co-opted member and has provided a thorough understanding of the issues faced by young people in Blackpool through her position as headteacher of St John Vianney Catholic Primary School.

Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee

The Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee has had a busy year focusing on a range of issues.

In addition to receiving Annual Reports on subjects such as Flood Risk Management, Leisure Services, Car Parking and Tourism Performance, a number of in-depth review panels have been held, allowing the Committee to scrutinise Council Plans and contribute to the development of policy and strategies. Monitoring of the projects such as Town Centre Regeneration and the implementation of the Single-Use Plastics Policy has also continued.

Focus point: Housing and homelessness scrutiny review

This year the committee agreed to undertake a Housing and Homelessness Scrutiny Review to consider the impact of the implementation of the Council Housing Strategy and Homelessness Reduction Strategy.

The review panel met a number of times in 2019/2020 and heard evidence from officers in the housing and benefits teams, Blackpool Housing Company Ltd, Fulfilling Lives and the Salvation Army. The panel also heard from an individual with lived experience of being homeless in Blackpool.

Issues discussed have included the work of the council's housing team, the impact of public protection enforcement, Blackpool's private housing market, the impact of universal credit and non-council services provided to support the homeless.

The review was put on hold in March 2020 due to Covid-19 and will be completed as soon as possible in 2020/2021. The scope of the review will need to be revisited following the pandemic.

Key pieces of work

- On 18 September 2019 the Committee held a review panel meeting to consider the draft Libraries Ambition Plan 2019-2024.

The committee met with officers and discussed the Plan and the Council's vision for its libraries. The meeting highlighted the value of libraries to Blackpool and how they can be used to promote learning and support health and wellbeing in the town.

- The Community Safety Plan 2019-2022 was considered by the committee at a review panel meeting held on 11 September 2019.

The panel met with members of the Community Safety Partnership, including; Lancashire Constabulary, Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service, the National Probation Service and Blackpool Clinical Commissioning Group. The panel endorsed the plan and agreed the need to undertake ongoing monitoring of the performance of the plan against its priorities.

- The committee identified the environment as a subject for scrutiny as part of its 2019-2020 work programming. As part of this it began work to monitor the implementation of the councils' declaration of a Climate Emergency.

An overview of actions undertaken by the council since the declaration was made in June 2019 was provided to the 5 February 2020 meeting of the committee. The Climate Emergency Action Plan which outlines all the actions identified that the Council will be undertaking in response to the declaration and progress against them will be considered by the committee in the new municipal year.

Future focus

The Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee will hold an annual work planning workshop in July 2020 to identify key issues with officers and Executive Members for future scrutiny. The committee has identified the Illuminations in particular as an area of work for 2020/2021 and will continue to prioritise scrutiny of climate change action and tourism performance as well as carrying out its statutory duties in the review of the Community Safety Partnership. Topics may need to be reviewed in response to the pandemic.

Future policy development work identified:

- Clean Air Strategy
- Lancashire Waste Strategy

Cross committee working

The three scrutiny committees have been carrying out more joined up working than ever. This is in part thanks to the role of the Scrutiny Leadership Board in bringing the chairs and vice chairs together in a co-ordinating role and in part due to the nature of the issues being considered and that they arguably fall within the remit of more than one of the committees. Key pieces of work that have been carried out jointly:

Supported housing

The topic of Supported Housing was identified as a significant issue in Blackpool by the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee and as such a review was scheduled to be carried out in conjunction with the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee. The meeting was due to be held in April 2020 but has been delayed due to Covid-19.

Child and adolescent mental health services

Scrutiny of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services was identified as a key priority for the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee and a workshop on the redesign of services was held in conjunction with the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee. Members agreed that the proposals set out by the redesign were positive and to review the changes and outcomes made by the redesign approximately 18 months following the meeting, when proposals had been implemented.

Active Lives Strategy

The Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee set up a joint meeting with the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee to feed into the development of the Active Lives Strategy.

The meeting was facilitated by the council's consultants on the strategy, Knight, Kavanagh and Page. Issues discussed included encouraging the take up of sports, engaging young people, making better use of the council's leisure resources and working with partners to encourage healthier lifestyles.

A draft of the strategy will also be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

Community engagement strategy

Members from across the three scrutiny committees were appointed to input into the Community Engagement Strategy. A focus was placed on ensuring departments were complying with the policy and responding to members of the public and managing expectations as appropriate.

The challenge ahead

Significant improvements to scrutiny have been made over the past 18 months. A new structure has been implemented and relationships between the executive and scrutiny members have been improved, however, there is still improvement to be made. The pandemic has had a massive impact on the work of the council and scrutiny needs to determine its role in the ongoing response. Scrutiny at Blackpool needs to develop an improved programme for budget and financial scrutiny throughout the year and determine both the individual committees' roles and the Scrutiny Leadership Board's role in that process. Further work is also required on improving public engagement and the use of social media to encourage that engagement. Both of these issues have been identified by the Scrutiny Leadership Board for development and work has already commenced.

There is also a challenge ahead in driving forward the work of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee to ensure that it is supporting and challenging Children's Services to make improvement. The committee's true role in this process has not yet been defined in Blackpool.

In 2020/2021 there will be a drive to demonstrate the impact of scrutiny at Blackpool through review of previous recommendations and working towards identifying the impact of those recommendations on service provision. This is not something that has been demonstrated before due to the difficulties in finding meaningful evidence that can be attributed to scrutiny recommendations. We will still be striving to achieve this.

Further training for members has also been identified as a priority. A refresher will be held on the key roles and abilities of a scrutiny

member, it is hoped that a peer to peer training course can be held on how to be an effective scrutineer and once the scrutiny review impact work has been concluded a training session will be held to identify learning from that review. Ongoing training for members is vital to ensure they are supported and encouraged to provide both essential challenge to decision makers and can make a positive contribution to developing policy and scrutiny review work.

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