

**REGENERATION AND NEIGHBOURHOODS
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Wednesday 16th September 2015**

PRESENT – Councillors *Surve* (Chair), *Ali*, *Casey*, *Connor*, *Entwistle*, *Hollings*, *Khonat*, *Julie Slater*, *Whalley*, *Whittle* and *Wright*.

Also Present –

Brian Bailey	Director of Regeneration
Paul Lee	Head of Service Support to the Committee
Mebz Bobat	Head of Service Support to the Committee
John Addison	Principal Scrutiny Officer
Rebekah Mottershead	Scrutiny Support Officer

RESOLUTIONS

12. Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Regeneration and Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

13. Minutes of the meeting held on the 15th July 2015

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on the 15th July 2015 be agreed as a correct record.

14. Declarations of Interest in items on this Agenda

Cllr Whalley declared a personal interest in respect of Minute Item 15 as he worked at Blackburn College.

15. Partnership Working with Blackburn College

The Chair welcomed the Director of Regeneration to the meeting and invited him to provide the Committee with an overview of how the Council worked with Blackburn College and other key partners.

Members were advised that the department engaged with partners on two main levels; education and business growth and development. It was noted that the intended outcome of this partnership working was to heighten employability skills, and create employment opportunities throughout the borough.

It was noted that a key outcome of collaborative working was to build a dynamic, futureproof business environment that would attract professionals and graduates to remain within the borough.

It was reported that the Council engaged with over 20 businesses and educational establishments including; Blackburn College, Training 2000, National Apprenticeship Service, East Lancashire Chamber of Commerce, Regenerate Pennine Lancashire and local public service boards such as the ELHT and the Police.

It was noted that members of Blackburn College's senior management team were engaged with/represented on the following initiatives;

- Blackburn with Darwen Employment Task Group
- Blackburn with Darwen Employment Skills and Leadership Summit
- Local Strategic Partnership Prosperous Group
- Hive- Blackburn with Darwen Business Leaders Network
- Blackburn Business Improvement District
- My First Job – Recruitment Event
- Construction Group
- Northgate THI Bid

Members heard that it was important for schools and businesses to pull together commonalities to enable the successful delivery of key priority actions such as increasing the employability of young people, and those who were 50 plus. It was noted that as these two groups often required a lot of support, the department was optimistic that it would receive European grant funding to help put provision in place to target these demographics.

Members questioned how the department intended to target these two groups. The Director of Regeneration advised;

- That utilising the expertise of partner agencies such as Bootstrap, teamed with social media promotions and referrals through Jobcentre Plus had proven to be successful for those who were 50 plus.
- That the 'My First Job' careers event that brought together numerous employers and education establishments to hold a careers day was a key way of targeting the under 25s

It was noted that the team was working hard to ascertain ways to build on this to prevent people falling through any potential gaps.

It was reported that whilst core funding had been put into the provision of apprenticeship schemes, such as Training 2000, to increase the amount of on the job training throughout the borough, some companies were resorting to setting up their own schemes to meet the skill requirements of their business.

The Director indicated that an employment and skills leadership summit had been established to bring together business and education providers to look to identify areas of skills shortages and to tailor apprenticeships to make young people employment ready and to enable skills supply to meet demand.

Members raised concerns that whilst graduate production and retention was lower within the borough than in other areas, further and higher education was under significant threat from cutbacks. It was noted that collaboration with Blackburn University Centre would be beneficial to provide and promote courses which would meet business needs and attract external investors (retail, leisure and nightlife) to an area with a thriving university.

It was reported that there was a dichotomy between identifying skills gaps with time to implement appropriate courses, as by the time a course was completed, the skill requirement may have changed. It was noted that this was something that the department was working on moving forwards.

The Committee heard that a successful university was seen to be an attraction for an area. It was noted that Blackburn University Centre would soon have the power to validate their own degrees which would enable them to offer more courses. Members felt that additional promotion of the university would be beneficial.

A discussion was held regarding the potential to establish a link from Northgate through to Blackburn College. The Director advised that the department was exploring many options such as restaurants and other facilities to be introduced to this area. He indicated that National Heritage and Lotto bids would be explored to help fund such a development.

Members heard that many businesses that were part of the Blackburn Business Improvement District (BID), which allowed a levy to be taken from the business rates and utilised to assist with the regeneration/improve the environment in the area. It was noted that this scheme had been very successful.

The Committee noted that the Council had built strong, valuable relationships with Blackburn College and other key partners. The Chair thanked the director for his presentation and requested that key points raised by Members around (job creation, skill retention etc.), be reported through the various partnerships meetings the Council facilitates.

RESOLVED –

That the Director of Regeneration be thanked for his attendance

16. Update on Council's Capital Projects

The Chair invited the Director of Regeneration to provide the Committee with an update on the ongoing Town Centre Capital Projects including the Pennine Reach scheme and the Cathedral Quarter development.

Members were reminded that Pennine Reach was a complex multi-authority initiative that was being completed on live roads. It was reported that the scheme was designed to be a single system, with all areas becoming active at the same time. The Director indicated that this would be a challenge, therefore

collaborative working and good communication was essential to ensuring a successful outcome.

The Committee heard that given the specific schedule of the scheme, the department had not taken the decision to change the bus station contractors lightly. It was reported that risk assessments had been completed by the new contractor (Eric Wright) and work had now recommenced.

Members questioned if the change in contractor would result in any amendments to the original plans or create any further time delays. The Director advised that there would be no design changes, and that talks with Eric Wright around a revised, earlier, completion date had produced positive outcomes. It was reported that the development should be able to stay within budget as there was leeway for savings to offset any potential additions.

The Committee noted that the Pennine Reach scheme would allow the public access to real time travel information, electronic and universal ticketing. It was agreed that utilising technologies would help to enhance the customer experience and make the use of public transport easier and more appealing.

A discussion took place around the bus station delays. Members questioned how the Council could learn from this and were advised that the department would compile a lessons learned report for the scheme, analysis of which would be utilised when undertaking future developments.

It was reported that the Pennine Reach scheme was intended to build a gateway to the town to enable easier access for the public and entice new business investors to the area. The Director advised that infrastructure works in the Ewood area particularly to junction 6, which was to become a major employment site, were now reaching completion.

Members were informed that delays to the Furthergate section of the scheme was predominantly as a result of the Victorian infrastructure. It was advised that old pipe systems and plans had been a challenge as often problems would not present themselves until the team had dug down.

It was reported that the regeneration of the Freckleton Street area was now reaching its final component, with the department hoping for its completion around Easter 2016. The Director advised that empty properties in this area were to be marketed to new investors.

RESOLVED –

That a site visit be arranged to allow Members to see the progress made to date on the bus station and Cathedral Quarter development.

15. Task Group Update

The Principle Scrutiny Officer reminded the Committee that two task groups had taken place on the 19th August and the 9th September 2015 regarding Selective Landlord Licensing (SLL).

Members were provided with briefing notes which outlined the SLL consultation for the Infirmary area and the departments' proposals for a licensing handbook. A discussion was held around aspects of this handbook and its prospective availability date. Members were advised that the handbook would be available towards the end of this year.

It was agreed that the task group would reconvene to view the final draft of the licensing handbook before its final sign off by the Executive Member to allow for the Committee's input.

RESOLVED –

That a Task Group be arranged for the Committee to view the licencing handbook before its submission to the Executive Board to allow for their pre-decision Scrutiny.

16. Committees Work Programme

The Principal Scrutiny Officer presented the Committee's work programme report which highlighted the key priorities and risks which had been outlined by the Executive Members at the beginning of the municipal year.

It was noted that at its December meeting, the Committee would be provided with an update on;

- Town Centre Parking, looking at provision, free after 3, free weekend and blue badge
- Final update on the Town Centre Capital Projects

Members heard that outside its formal meetings, the Committee would complete a further task and finish group to view the Licencing Handbook once a final draft was available.

It was reported that the Committee would also be invited to view the consultation for Central Darwen to become subject to a Selective Landlord Licensing Scheme early in the New Year.

A further site visit was requested by Members to view the progress to date on the bus station and the Cathedral Quarter. The Principle Scrutiny Officer advised that this site visit would be arranged before the next meeting of the Committee.

Members were provided with a list of recommendations on Selective Landlord Licensing for their attention. It was requested that any comments/suggestions on these recommendations be forwarded to the Principle Scrutiny Officer by the 28th September 2015.

RESOLVED –

It was agreed;

1. That a task group be arranged to coincide with the consultation process for the Central Darwen areas of the Borough and for the Committee to view the licencing handbook
2. That a task group be arranged be arranged for the Committee to view the licencing handbook before its submission to the Executive Board to allow for their pre-decision Scrutiny
3. That any comments/suggestions on the Selective Landlord Licensing recommendations be forwarded to the Principle Scrutiny Officer by the 28th September 2015

Signed.....

Chair of the meeting at which the Minutes were signed

Date.....