

**Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee,**

**15<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

**Present-Councillor Khonat, in the Chair, Councillors Batan, Hardman, Marrow, McFall, Shorrocks, Sidat, Taylor,**

**Also Present- Phil Riley, Executive Member**

**Martin Kelly, Director of Growth and Development**

**Martin Eden, Director of Place**

**Paul Conlon, Democratic Services**

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting.

**2. Minutes of the meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2020.**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the chair.

**3. Declaration of interests**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

**4. Cemeteries and Burials.**

The Committee looked at the way that the service had addressed the challenges that had been caused by the pandemic and in particular how the service had to prepare sufficient graves in preparation for increased burial numbers, by pre-digging graves and keeping on top of these, to accommodate potential rises in death rates across the borough. The service had to work within Government legislation that saw restrictions on access to cemeteries and crematoriums with areas being closed, such as the crematoria for all but cremation services, plus cemeteries initially also, aside from services. Signage and communications had to be provided. The Government legislation periodically changed during the pandemic and cemetery access was eventually provided for those wishing to pay their respect to loved ones, but crematoriums remain closed to all but cremation services. Further Government restrictions on numbers attending both burials and cremations had changed periodically over the last 12 months, with the current restrictions allowing 22 mourners in the crematorium and 30 mourners at burials, to enable social distancing to be maintained. Face coverings are also mandatory for those who do not have any underlying conditions in the crematorium, with the Council providing them free to those who do not bring them.

The Committee were updated on how the service had sought to keep staff safe and on the introduction of webcasting of cremation services early April 2020. This had been positively welcomed. This has also been supplemented by additional music and video memorials being

made available for cremation services. This had necessitated the relaxation of restrictions on filming in cemeteries to enable burial services to be provided by family members as webcasting of burials was not possible due to the lack of Wi-Fi availability at gravesides.

Occasional breaches of numbers attending funerals had occurred, with these incidents reported directly to the Police, who were responsible for enforcing the legislation relating to gatherings. Where these incidents occur, the Council also writes to the funeral organisers, including funeral directors, requiring them to ensure the applicable number attending is maintained. Lighting had been provided for burials during the darker evenings in winter, to ensure numbers being buried each day are maximised. A temporary toilet facility has been hired, with regular cleaning taking place during the pandemic, given that during high numbers of funerals, there is limited access to toilet facilities.

The Committee looked at the current capacity of the boroughs cemeteries and work that was ongoing to identify suitable areas for development. The Committee thanked the director for the presentation and asked that these thanks be forwarded to all members of staff who had worked so hard on the front line of service provision during the pandemic and continue to do so.

**RESOLVED-** That the Committee revisit this area in the near future when suitable sites were proposed.

## **5. The Economic Recovery of the Borough.**

The Committee looked at the work undertaken in the Borough to seek to minimise the negative effects of the pandemic on the economy and businesses. The Executive Member outlined the successes that had been made in the economic development of the Borough prior to the pandemic including 5,000 new jobs created and 1,300 new homes delivered in the last 3-years with a strong enterprise culture, diverse economic base, cash-rich business community, growing international trade links & large health economy all being supported.

He outlined progress that had continued despite the pandemic including key developments progressing at Milking Lane, Wainwright Way, Carl Fogarty Way, with increasing enquiries for new business space. New housing developments were progressing at Griffin, Alaska St, Baileys Field, Fishmoor Drive, Holden Fold. The Mall / Markets re-opened with fewer occupiers. Footfall was rising (but 50% below pre-COVID levels) with major retailers withdrawing from all high streets.

There had been no major redundancies but severe difficulties elsewhere including Rolls-Royce at Barnoldswick & Safran in Burnley. At the peak of the pandemic 20,000 residents had been furloughed through COVID and 5,000 were still off work. Latest figures were expected to show a rise and delayed unemployment when national support ended was likely. The Portfolio would continue working with HIVE, BID, Chamber, Growth Lancashire to track business needs – Q&A sessions, surveys, surgeries, etc.

The Committee were informed that £55M in mandatory grant support had been provided to over 3,500 businesses, with £4M in discretionary grant support to 600 business. COVID business support grants on-going, though limited support for self-employed. Financial support was being provided for market traders in Blackburn and Darwen Market traders and to

hospitality and retail sector to adapt to COVID restrictions. Support was also being given to major employers for smart testing of their workforces

The Committee were updated on the work on Reimagining Lancashire – An Economic Recovery Framework with LCC, Blackpool and LEP which had been submitted the Government and led to a “Lancashire” Ministerial Taskforce to review recovery/long-term plans. The Growth Programme for 2020/21 had been agreed by Executive Board and was on track and progress on initiatives including the Darwen Town Investment Plan and Blackburn Growth Axis was ongoing to maximise the potential of the Boroughs economy.

**RESOLVED-** That the Committee welcomed the work that was being undertaken to protect the Boroughs economy and the potential developments outlined in the growth strategy.

Chair at the meeting where the minutes are signed.....

Date.....