

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Minutes

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of Wyre Borough Council held on Monday, 15 July 2024 at the Committee Room 2 - Civic Centre.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee members present:

Councillors Cartridge, Baxter, Amos, Sir R Atkins, Fail, Martin, A Walker, Belshaw, Robinson, Le Marinel and Bowen

Absent- apologies received:

Councillor Blair

Absent- apologies not received

Councillor Bolton

Other councillors present:

Councillors Le Marinel and Bowen

Officers present:

Marianne Unwin, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager (Temporary)

Jack Tickle, Democratic Services Officer

Sarah Palmer, Director of Transformation and Change

Mark Fenton, Economic Development Manager

Jane Warne, Communications and Visitor Economy Manager

No members of the public or press attended the meeting.

9 Declarations of interest

None.

10 Confirmation of minutes

The minutes of the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 June 2024 were **confirmed** as a correct record.

11 Economic Development and Visitor Economy Strategy - update from officers

Sarah Palmer, the Director of Transformation and Change, submitted a report on the Economic Development and Visitor Economy Strategy. The report updated members of the committee on the Wyre Council Economic Development and Visitor Economy Strategy, which was part of the Growth and Prosperity programme.

The committee was informed that the strategy was in its early stages of development and that officers were seeking feedback on the strategy and ways this could be improved further.

Comments and questions raised by the committee were as follows:

- Regarding 5.1 of the report, a question was raised over big issues that the report was referring to. Mark Fenton clarified that the big issues could be found within appendix A of the report.
- Councillor Fail raised concerns regarding hotel and visitor accommodation. He suggested that there had been a decrease in hotels across Wyre and a steady increase in Airbnb accommodation that was unregulated across the borough and was also located close to residential properties. Additional regulation would be needed from the Government.
- Councillor Fail welcomed the creation of a strategy on tourism but proposed that it focused on how to attract people to Wyre and stay in overnight accommodation.
- Councillor Peter Le Marinel, the Portfolio Holder for Planning Policy and Economic Development, suggested that the development of overnight visitor accommodation could be explored as part of the Wyre Local Plan.
- Councillor Baxter raised concerns over the decline in the local hotel industry. He highlighted that the regulation of the Airbnb industry had been a focal point within the Lake District and suggested that this could become a Local Plan amenity. Additionally, Councillor Baxter queried what was being looked at regarding the Town Centre Regeneration Frameworks across Wyre.
- Members commented on potential issues of pedestrianisation within town centres. They suggested this may limit the amount of people who could drive into the town centre and visit the area.
- Members discussed the restoration of empty properties to use as overnight visitor accommodation. It was confirmed that the Council was working on tackling the issue of empty properties mainly focusing on residential use and affordable housing.
- In response to a question from the Chairman, Mark Fenton confirmed that most businesses in Wyre were small and there were challenges with attracting larger organisations to invest and develop within the borough.
- It was noted that businesses could be encouraged into the borough of Wyre through the reopening of the Fleetwood Railway line, which would run from Poulton to Fleetwood. Councillor Peter Le Marinel commented that this decision would need to be taken by the Government.
- It was requested that an update on Marsh Mill in Thornton was provided at a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Following discussions that took place, members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to the following recommendations:

- 1) That Councillor Peter Le Marinel would evaluate available support for farmers within the economic development and visitor economy strategy and report back to the committee at a future date.
- 2) That the total number of tourism attractions directly owned by Wyre Council were provided to the committee as a written response.
- 3) That an update on Marsh Mill was provided at a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair thanked the officer and portfolio holder for their attendance. The committee noted the report.

12 Hillhouse Enterprise Zone - update

Sarah Palmer, the Director of Transformation and Change, submitted a report on the Hillhouse Enterprise Zone.

Sarah Palmer provided the committee an update on the status of the Hillhouse Enterprise Zone (EZ). Wyre Council was the accountable body to the Enterprise Zone and entered a Memorandum of Understanding with Government, Lancashire County Council and the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership in 2016.

Comments and questions raised by the committee were as follows:

- In response to a query, feasibility work regarding a rail overbridge on the site was on going.
- Members commented that the Hillhouse Enterprise Zone may benefit from fresh analysis to assess where economic development could be improved further.
- Sarah Palmer explained that changes were being made to improve the Council's position with Hillhouse. Effective working relationships were being established and she had asked to be informed when enquiries were received to gain additional insight on ideas for investment. Arranging more collaborative meetings with Blackpool Council was viewed as a priority.
- It was estimated that around 2/3rds of the Hillhouse Enterprise Zone was vacant.
- It was confirmed by officers that the Hillhouse Enterprise Zone Masterplan was being updated.
- Members expressed concerns over the lack of progress and investment into the Hillhouse Enterprise Zone.
- Councillor Baxter asked whether hydrogen technology was still being assessed for investment into the Hillhouse Enterprise Zone. Councillor Le Marinel confirmed that the technology was still being looked at for further development.
- Uncertainty over the reopening of the Fleetwood railway line was viewed as the biggest obstacle to future development within the Hillhouse Enterprise Zone. Members queried options that were available, other ideas had been discussed but no specific plans had been agreed.
- Members raised concerns about the increase in housing and the growing impact of employment and road infrastructure.

- Councillor Le Marinel commented that a common issue was Hillhouse businesses absorbing staff from each other. It was important to continue to expand apprenticeship places to improve skills and employment shortages within the Enterprise Zone.
- Councillor Atkins suggested that discussions could take place with Lancashire County Council to deliver alternative ideas if the railway line was not reopened.
- Councillor Baxter commented on issues with the national grid supply of electricity to Hillhouse from Electricity North West.
- Hillhouse was designated as an Enterprise Zone to provide funding which could be reinvested into the site. The money available would need to be allocated or it would have to be returned.
- Councillor Le Marinel updated members that Steve Smith, Assistant Director of Planning and Building Control and Karl Glover, Planning Development Manager, were now in regular meetings with Lancashire Highways to discuss the issue of improving road infrastructure across Wyre.
- Sarah Palmer highlighted that the masterplan was due to be updated. The intention was to host a workshop with officers and portfolio holders in early Autumn and an update would be provided once work had begun on the updated masterplan.

Following discussions that took place, members requested that a written update on The Hillhouse Enterprise Zone was provided to the committee after proposed work had begun to develop the masterplan.

The Committee noted the report.

13 Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2024/25 – update report

The Director of Finance and Governance (S151 Officer), Clare James, submitted a report on the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2024/25.

Jack Tickle, Democratic Services Officer, updated members of the committee on the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2024/25.

He explained that the Communications – service monitoring item had been moved to the September meeting of the committee due to the availability of staff to provide an update on the work being developed. The Asset register and Asset Management Strategy had been rescheduled for the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny in January 2025. This ensured that November’s meeting of Overview and Scrutiny could focus on topics specific to Council finances.

It was highlighted that the fly tipping task group scoping document was in development and the document would be brought to September’s meeting for review.

Councillor Walker queried appendix 2 of the work programme and whether the answer to a question regarding homeless cases within Wyre should have read as ‘presented’ instead of ‘prevented’.

It was **agreed** that officers within Democratic Services would check Councillor Walker's query upon conclusion of the meeting.

The report was noted.

The meeting started at 6pm and finished at 6:55pm.

Date of Publication: 23 July 2024