

Lancashire County Council

External Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday, 29th November, 2021 at 10.30 am in Committee Room 'A' - The Tudor Room, County Hall, Preston

Present:

County Councillor Peter Britcliffe (Chair)

County Councillors

R Swarbrick	K Iddon
A Ali OBE	J Mein
N Aziz	M Salter
L Beavers	M Tomlinson
A Cheetham	D Westley
S Clarke	

County Councillors Jennifer Mein and David Westley replaced County Councillors Nikki Hennessy and John Singleton JP for the meeting.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies received.

2. Constitution: Chair and Deputy Chair; Membership; Terms of Reference

Resolved: That the appointment of Chair and Deputy Chair; the membership of the committee and the terms of reference, as presented, be noted.

3. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

No interests were declared.

4. Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 March 2021

Resolved: That the minutes from the meeting held on 16 March 2021, be confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

5. Supporting Lancashire Businesses during COVID-19

Andy Walker, Head of Business Growth, Lancashire County Council, Amin Vepari, Senior Project Officer, Lancashire County Council and Andy Leeming, Boost Programme Manager, Lancashire County Council, presented a report on the funding made available from the Government and the support provided by the county council to businesses in Lancashire during the COVID-19 pandemic.

County Councillor Aidy Riggott, Cabinet Member for Economic Development was also in attendance to support the presentation and answer any questions from the committee.

The presentation covered the following topics in relation to the support and funding available to businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- National Business Support Offer
- Local ERDF Grants
- Local Business Support Provision (Boost)
- Financial Support Offer
- Skills and Employment
- Early thoughts on the impact

A copy of the presentation is set out in the minutes.

In terms of the questions raised by the committee following the presentation, the following points were clarified:

- In terms of the take up of the European Regional Development Fund Covid 19 Grants (delivered on behalf of Boost) there was a consistent recognition of a lower awareness and take-up of the Boost scheme in general across Hyndburn than in other areas which might have explained the low take-up. However, the committee was informed that this point needed to be offset with the actions taken by Hyndburn Borough Council at the time Covid 19 grants were offered through Boost. It was reported Hyndburn Borough Council was very active and quick in offering its own grants for businesses in the area , which may have appealed to some businesses in the area if they were looking to access funding in response to Covid 19.
- In relation to the financial networks (Lancashire Business Angels Networks), it was noted that there were two financial hubs set up in Lancashire. One in Central Lancashire and one in the North of Lancashire. The reason for why there were only two hubs in Lancashire, was due to the financial advisors only travelling within a 1-hour radius of each hub to visit businesses. Having the hubs in these two locations, covered most of Lancashire. However, work was planned in 2022 to introduce another hub in East Lancashire.
- On bounce back loans, it was noted that procedures were in place to ensure grants were not granted to dubious entities. However, careful consideration was needed to ensure grants were given to those companies that truly needed them, while still ensuring the companies' credentials were valid.
- In terms of repaying Pay As You Grow loans, it was noted that the Government had employed a team of people whose jobs it was to pursue any debts and to reclaim the money.
- It was noted that a Bite Size Briefing would be held for all county councillors, at the beginning of 2022 on the Financial Support Programme

for Lancashire Businesses. The briefing would inform county councillors on what support was available to businesses and how councillors were able to find out more information, so they could inform the businesses in their division.

- It was clarified that the total number of loans offered through government backed funding mechanisms either through the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) and the Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBLs), were to individual organisations. There was no duplication.
- Access to Finance Lancashire organisation provided impartial advice and was not aligned with any specific fund. There were a number of cases where businesses had identified additional ways to access funding, release capital and make efficiency savings to demonstrate resilience rather than take on additional debts.
- On whether there was less take-up of the European Regional Development Fund Covid 19 Grants and less support available for rural businesses, it was noted that the scheme was being administered by the county councils' dedicated rural grants team, and there was a strong presence of rural businesses accessing funding and support.
- On lessons learned from working with district council colleagues it was felt that integrating district councils' knowledge of businesses through business rates interactions combined with the county council's knowledge of businesses through the sectors they operated in could be explored. It was noted that there was a difficulty in recruiting the right level of skilled staff for the demand that was currently required by businesses.
- A number of areas were being explored in relation to any future County Deal with discussions taking place between the county council and the district councils across Lancashire, building on the goodwill and partnership working developed during the pandemic.

Members expressed thanks for all the support provided by the county council in providing advice and support for businesses throughout the pandemic.

Resolved: That, the support provided to businesses in Lancashire during the COVID-19 pandemic, be noted.

6. Lancashire Strategic Assessment 2022-2025

Debbie Thompson, Public Health Specialist, Lancashire County Council, Alison Wilkins, Senior Public Health Practitioner, Lancashire County Council, Lee Sculpher, Lancashire Constabulary and Steffani Hull, Lancashire Police and Crime Commissioner's Office presented a report on the Lancashire Strategic Assessment 2022-2025. County Councillor Peter Buckley, Cabinet Member for Community and Cultural Services was in attendance in support of the report.

It was noted that the purpose of this Strategic Assessment was to highlight significant crime and anti-social behaviour threats and issues that impacted on community safety. It was the key evidence base that supported the Community

Safety Agreement, local partnership plans, the Policing and Crime Plan and the Constabulary Control Strategy.

It was reported that the key risks and threats impacting across the county included the following:

- Domestic abuse
- Violence
- Exploitation – criminal and sexual
- Serious Organised Crime
- Road safety

In terms of the questions raised by the committee, the following points were clarified:

- The committee raised concerns about young offenders being sent outside of the County and the risks this posed to breaking up families. It was noted that the points raised would be taken away and sent to the services.
- Following concerns raised by the committee about raising awareness within schools in relation to hate crimes, it was noted that funding had been received to improve awareness and work had begun in conjunction with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to educate children in schools, such as introducing the Healthy Relationship Programme. The Healthy Relationship Programme was rolled out to all schools from 1 November 2021 and was being provided by local specialist organisations covering topics such as consent, misogyny, sexual harassment, stalking and digital online abuse. It was agreed that a copy of the Healthy Relationships Programme document be circulated to members of the External Scrutiny Committee following the meeting.
- Concerns were also raised about how easy it was for young people to obtain alcohol, drugs and fake I.Ds. The points raised were noted and would be taken back to be investigated.
- It was noted that following the Notice of Motion passed at the last Full Council meeting on 14 October 2021 in relation to making misogyny a hate crime, it was noted that discussions were ongoing between the relevant Cabinet Members, members, officers and the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office.

Resolved: That;

- i. The key themes within the Strategic Assessment, as the main elements that will feature in the Community Safety Agreement, be noted as they would be the issues that underpin the development of local partnership plans, and the setting of priorities for the next three years.
- ii. The Strategic Assessment and local district profiles will be used as evidence to support commissioning activity and targeting of issues across the county be recognised.

- iii. Support be given for the Strategic Assessment as the evidence base to enable further work on the related issues, for example, domestic abuse, exploitation (criminal/sexual), vulnerability and safeguarding, and cyber-crime.

7. External Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2021/22

The committee reviewed the draft work programme for 2021/22.

In noting that Universal Credit appeared under the list of topics for potential inclusion on the programme, it was suggested that at the next meeting of the committee, the scrutiny report on Universal Credit be presented and a discussion take place on the findings

County Councillor Keith Iddon proposed that the report on Universal Credit be assessed by the Chair with officers so that a decision could be taken on when the report be submitted to the External Scrutiny Committee. The proposal was seconded by County Councillor David Westley. An amendment was proposed by County Councillor Azhar Ali that by the end of the week, the report on Universal Credit be circulated to members of the External Scrutiny Committee and for it to be brought back to the next scheduled meeting of the External Scrutiny Committee meeting on 11 January 2022. The amendment was seconded by County Councillor Lorraine Beavers.

Having been put to the vote, the amendment was lost, and the substantive proposal was passed. It was therefore:

Resolved: That, the report on Universal Credit be assessed by the Chair with officers so that a decision could be taken on when the report be submitted to the External Scrutiny Committee.

8. Urgent Business

There were no items of Urgent Business.

9. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the External Scrutiny Committee would take place on Tuesday 1 March 2022 at 10.30am.

L Sales
Director of Corporate Services

County Hall
Preston