

Lancashire County Council

Internal Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday, 11th September, 2020 at 10.00 am in Skype Virtual Meeting - Skype

Present:

County Councillor David O'Toole (Chair)

County Councillors

M Salter	E Lewis
T Ashton	P Rigby
C Crompton	P Steen
J Fillis	D Whipp
D Foxcroft	G Wilkins
S Holgate	

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

County Councillor David Whipp declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 5 as he was the Lead Member for Covid-19 at Pendle Borough Council.

County Councillor Erica Lewis declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 5 as she was the Leader of Lancaster City Council and was responsible for Lancaster City Council's response to Covid-19.

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

The report presented set out the constitution, membership, chair and deputy chair and terms of reference of the Internal Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the municipal year 2020/21.

Resolved: That Internal Scrutiny Committee note:

1. The appointment of County Councillors David O'Toole and Matthew Salter as Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year.
2. The Membership of the Committee following the County Council's Annual Meeting on 16 July 2020; and
3. The Terms of Reference of the Committee.

4. Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 July 2020

In regard to Agenda Item 5, Redefining Lancashire: Our Approach to Recovery, there was a request to have noted that there had been some discussion and dissatisfaction due to there not being a cabinet member in attendance at the meeting to present the item. In addition, significant concerns were raised that the county council had represented that district councils had agreed to the Redefining Lancashire document when they disputed that they had not.

Resolved: That subject to the inclusion of the above points, the minutes from the meeting held on 10 July 2020 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

5. Lancashire's Response to Covid-19

The Chair welcomed Angie Ridgwell, Chief Executive; County Councillor Keith Iddon, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport; County Councillor Shaun Turner, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing; County Councillor Graham Gooch, Cabinet Member for Adult Services; and Mike Kirby, Director of Strategy and Performance, to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport stated that Highways and Transport had been extremely busy during the pandemic. One of the tasks faced was building the temporary morgue at Warton. The main transport issue was in relation to getting pupils back to school in a safe manner. A detailed update from the Highways Team had been presented at the last meeting of the Internal Scrutiny Committee. The team was making progress in getting back to normal.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing stated that public health and wellbeing had been central to the Lancashire Resilience Forum (LRF) and it had been vital to reduce the impact of the pandemic on the communities and individuals of Lancashire. Throughout the pandemic the Public Health Team had worked closely with Public Health England and continued to work closely with district councils to ensure premises were Covid-19 secure across Lancashire. The team had worked very closely with public health commissioned services and the county council had also been required to set up an Outbreak Engagement Board.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Services stated that the biggest policy decision the Government had been faced with was to ensure the NHS was not overwhelmed. The county council's main adult social care priority had been to ensure the safe and effective delivery of care to those who needed it by supporting care homes and other providers. The county council had developed a comprehensive daily tracker which was used to record significant amounts of data in relation to Covid-19 that was used to provide national data, this took an enormous strain off from care homes and providers and was welcomed support across Lancashire. A dedicated Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) phone hotline and online ordering pathway was made available so that providers and care homes were able to let us know their needs.

Angie Ridgwell, Chief Executive presented committee members with an update on Lancashire's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The presentation covered topics suggested by Members as part of the Internal Scrutiny Committee work planning session which took place on 29 May 2020. The three suggested areas of finance, social care and children would be looked at separately and in depth by the Budget Scrutiny Review Panel, the Health Scrutiny Committee and the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

At the beginning of lockdown Lancashire County Council made rapid decisions during an unprecedented, fast moving situation which set the tone for its response to the pandemic. This included supporting all county council staff in working from home and providing councillors with corporate laptops to facilitate access to meetings.

A key priority for the county council was to protect the vulnerable people of Lancashire particularly in maintaining the adult social care market. The LRF had moved quickly to bring together all of the county council's partners, in particular the district councils. Community hubs were set up very quickly and the county council was able to secure strategic reserves of food and PPE. This enabled the county to move forward and protect the people of Lancashire.

Emergency procedures and delegations were brought in very quickly at the start of the pandemic, all decisions were recorded and published on C-First to enable transparency. The county council worked closely with national bodies and with Government to ensure any decisions that were being made were in line with the national approach. Throughout the crisis there was effective communication with daily updates to staff, leadership briefings and two Bite Size Briefings had been held with the Director of Public Health with a further update planned. A Local Outbreak Engagement Board had been established and was a significant move, moving forward it would play a key role in how Lancashire responded to Covid-19.

Lancashire County Council's response to the pandemic had meant it had drawn significantly on its resources. Services and staff continued to face significant pressures and the ongoing impact could not be underestimated. A strategy needed to be developed to work in this new environment and prioritise the council's resources.

A number of issues and comments were raised by members and the following points were noted:

- Praise was given to the residents of Lancashire, the county council's staff and elected members for their response throughout the pandemic.
- There was concerns about the pressures community testing sites were under. Since schools had opened up again, the demand on the testing system had doubled. Testing sites were manually intensive.
- Members enquired about how the county council was reacting to community cohesion issues.

- There were serious concerns around mental health issues during the pandemic.
- The committee enquired about how Lancashire coped with the mixed messages coming from national agencies. The complexity of the messages was an issue. There were different rules for different areas of the county. All areas needed to work together.
- The current rules on visiting care homes were a serious concern.
- It was stated that vulnerable elderly people had been transferred from hospitals to care homes without being tested, this may have caused cross contamination in care homes and therefore further deaths from Covid-19. A question was asked in regards to how many elderly people died prematurely of Covid-19 in Lancashire's care homes.
- Regarding Covid-19 marshals, the committee was informed that the marshals would be funded by the district councils and not by Lancashire County Council.
- There was some concern that the county council had not delivered satisfactory democratic leadership during the Covid-19 crisis.
- There needed to be good guidance developed for schools on how they operated during the crisis.
- Members enquired about how the county council would claim back the money it had spent in responding to the pandemic and what the financial impact of the Covid-19 crisis had been. It was noted that the Budget Scrutiny Panel would look into this in more detail. A report had been presented to Cabinet detailing the county council's financial situation. The Government had made three tranche levels of money available to the county council to date. It was pointed out to the committee that Lancashire was not going to get the full resources it needed in order to respond to the crisis.
- Lancashire County Council needed a working model that was sustainable
- It was noted that Lancashire County Council was working within a national system which did not necessarily have the nuances needed at a local level.
- The county council needed to make local strategic decisions and needed to make its decisions about its response quickly.

Resolved: That Internal Scrutiny Committee:

1. Note the update presented.
2. Revisit the situation again in the New Year and to receive a further update using the programme of topics discussed as a basis.

6. Work Planning 2020/21

The committee was presented with a single combined work programme for all of the Lancashire County Council scrutiny committees.

The topics included were identified at a work planning workshop for members of the Internal Scrutiny Committee held on 29 May 2020 and subsequently discussed at meetings of all the scrutiny committees.

The Chair welcomed Josh Mynott, Democratic Services Manager, to the meeting. It was pointed out that the work planning process was critical to the success of scrutiny. The committee was asked to think about why they wanted a certain topic to come to scrutiny and what questions they wanted to ask on the topic so that scrutiny officers could invite the appropriate cabinet members and officers to the meeting.

There was a request for scrutiny to look at how Lancashire could greater benefit and get added value during the Covid-19 crisis.

The role of engagement with councillors in civil contingencies was another area which could be looked at.

Regarding the item on speeding traffic and the lack of enforcement scheduled for the November 2020 meeting, there was a request to invite the police to the meeting as well as representation from the Lancashire Partnership for Road Safety.

Resolved: The Internal Scrutiny Committee noted the single combined work plan presented.

7. Urgent Business

There were no items of Urgent Business.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The next virtual meeting of the Internal Scrutiny Committee would take place on Friday 13 November 2020 at 10.00am.

L Sales
Director of Corporate Services

County Hall
Preston