

Lancashire County Council

External Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday, 16th March, 2021 at 10.00 am in Teams Virtual Meeting - Teams

Present:

County Councillor Edward Nash PSC (Chair)

County Councillors

J Shedwick	T Martin
A Ali OBE	S C Morris
I Brown	G Oliver
S Clarke	P Steen
C Crompton	B Yates

County Councillor Barrie Yates replaced County Councillor David Stansfield on a permanent basis.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from County Councillor Liz Oades.

2. Constitution: Appointment of Deputy Chair

Resolved: The External Scrutiny Committee noted the appointment of County Councillor John Shedwick as Deputy Chair for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year.

3. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None were disclosed.

4. Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 January 2021

Resolved: That the minutes from the meeting held on 12 January 2021 be confirmed as an accurate record.

5. Joint Draft Lancashire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2021-2027 and Progress Report on Strengthening Flood Risk Management and Preparedness

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Rachel Crompton, Principal Flood Risk Officer; Laura Makeating, Principal Flood Risk Officer; and Marcus Leigh, Highways Service Manager (Infrastructure).

A presentation was delivered to the committee on the joint draft Lancashire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2021-2027. In addition, members were presented with a progress report on the implementation of agreed actions following the recommendations of the Strengthening Flood Risk Management and Preparedness Task and Finish Group report as adopted by the External Scrutiny Committee.

During the presentation, the following points were highlighted:

- The strategy was the scene setting for all the flood risk management work that the county council did with its partners across Lancashire.
- The new draft strategy was now out for public consultation to seek views on the strategy's proposals.
- The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 stated that a local authority must develop, maintain, apply and monitor a strategy for flood risk management in its area. The strategy had to align with the national strategy.
- The Local Flood Risk Management Strategy was a strategic level document which set out how Lancashire County Council intended to manage local flood risks across Lancashire until 2027.
- Feedback from the consultation would be analyzed and changes made where necessary. The strategy would need Cabinet approval and then Full Council approval in late summer 2021.
- The vision was that by 2027 Lancashire would be a flood resilient place responsive to risks, challenges and opportunities supporting a sustainable future for the people of Lancashire.

In response to questions and comments from members, the following information was clarified:

- There was concern about the Flood Risk Management Team being overwhelmed with the number of requests for advice from local planning authorities. Lancashire County Council were a statutory consultee on all major planning applications and tried to respond to them within the statutory timescale. Significant improvements had been made on response times. The county council had no control on the publication of its responses by local planning authorities. There was a request for relevant county councillors to be copied into the county council's responses.
- Regarding the listing and mapping of Lancashire's water courses, members enquired if the delivery date for this of March 2027 could be improved on.
- Lancashire County Council good contact with around 50 Lancashire flood action groups and local resilience groups. It was important to ensure these groups received the advice and support they needed.
- On the draft culvert policy, it was acknowledged that the county council could not progress this until the strategy had been approved.
- On United Utilities not being a statutory consultee for planning applications it was noted that all comments received by local planning authorities had to be treated equally irrespective of where they came from. Making water

companies statutory consultees wouldn't give them any additional powers. United Utilities were very proactive in reviewing planning lists as applications could pose a business risk to their assets.

- It was highlighted that the Flood Risk Management Team was not an emergency service but an investigatory and regulatory service.

Resolved: That;

1. The next steps planned for the Flood Risk Management Strategy be noted.
2. The progress report on strengthening flood risk management and preparedness be noted.

6. Chair's update

The Chair welcomed County Councillor Michael Green, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Environment and Planning to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Environment and Planning pointed out that Lancashire County Council was proud of what it had achieved in terms of carbon reduction. The authority was committed to moving towards net zero carbon emissions as soon as possible.

The Cabinet Member had put forward a new Environment and Climate programme for Lancashire County Council, which had been approved by Cabinet in March 2021, to tackle environmental and climate issues. The programme would look at reducing carbon emissions from county council properties, large scale tree planting, local air quality management, encouraging active travel, improving green spaces, and peat land restoration and carbon capture. The budget had now been set out for the programme.

In response to questions and comments from members, the following information was clarified:

- The county council was currently reviewing its fleet of vehicles in terms of going electric or hybrid. The council was not at the stage where it could replace all its fleet with such vehicles as it had to ensure the vehicles were cost effective and fit for purpose.
- More and more charging points for electric vehicles were being established by Lancashire County Council and its partners. Although the lack of charging points at the county hall complex was noticeable.
- The committee was informed that the Highways Team had made significant reductions in carbon.
- On whether Lancashire County Council was taking the lead on carbon reduction and energy conservation, it was noted that this work was being done in conjunction with district councils as part of the Greater Lancashire Plan. Internally the council was currently establishing an inter-directorate management group to co-ordinate and manage activity and working

relationships with Lancashire businesses, landowners and housing developers.

- It was acknowledged that more should be done to promote the activity the council was engaged in with carbon reduction and energy conservation, and the contributions it had made.
- On the committee's previous recommendation to hold a Green Summit, it was acknowledged that this would probably take place in a virtual format.
- On embracing new technologies, the county council had to ensure they were the correct technologies.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Environment and Planning for his update.

County Councillor Gillian Oliver and Joanne Barker, Welfare Rights Manager, presented initial findings from rapporteur activities in relation to Universal Credit in Lancashire as agreed by the committee at its previous meeting held on 12 January 2021.

In February 2020 five recommendations had been formulated by the External Scrutiny Committee and put to the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, County Councillor Shaun Turner. By January 2021 no response had been received.

In February 2021 County Councillor Oliver had met with County Councillor Turner and Joanne Barker with a view of moving forward with the five recommendations. It was decided to concentrate on four areas which were:

- To commend the work of the Welfare Rights Service.
- To recognise the increased burden on the service since the roll out of Universal Credit.
- To consider what extra strains had been put on the staff.
- To ask the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing to write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to ask for additional resources to enable the most disadvantaged in Lancashire to be properly supported.

It was reported that County Councillor Turner had now written to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

The committee was informed that there were three key areas of work that had increased dramatically during the pandemic and needed consideration. These were:

- The Shared Lives Service - Lancashire's carers and the people who were being cared for would lose income when making any claims for Universal Credit. For Lancashire County Council this could mean losing carers.
- The Care Financial Assessment team - work the Lancashire County Council did to support people and understand the money they were receiving from their benefits and how much needed to be paid back to the

county council in respect of care packages. This work was increasing as Universal Credit was changing people's incomes.

- The work of the Financial Safeguarding team - and the strain being put on it through processing and managing Universal Credit appointeeships for vulnerable adults at risk of financial abuse.

The concern for the Welfare Rights Team was to identify and understand the impact on all Lancashire County Council's frontline staff whose roles were to provide care and not financial advice.

The following points were raised and clarified:

- It was noted that there was real hardship in some areas of Lancashire and the work of the Welfare Rights Services was very valued.
- It was hoped that representatives from the Department of Work and Pensions would engage with the committee on this issue.
- Universal Credit had been increased by an extra £20 per week and been extended for an extra 6 months in alignment with the furlough scheme.
- Input from the Citizens Advice Bureau on Universal Credit had been greatly appreciated by the committee.
- The Chair suggested that he would present the rapporteur report conclusions to the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing for further action. It was also suggested that the topic of Universal Credit should be a continuing item for the External Scrutiny Committee to review after the elections in May.

Resolved: That the Chair's update be noted.

7. Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2020/21

In considering the work programme for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year, it was suggested that given the context of this meeting and the updates provided the next meeting scheduled for Tuesday 13 April be cancelled and that the new committee after the elections consider continuing the review of Flood Risk Management, Carbon Reduction and Universal Credit.

Resolved: That the External Scrutiny Committee in the new administration continue to review Flood Risk Management, Carbon Reduction and Universal Credit.

8. Urgent Business

There was no Urgent Business.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the External Scrutiny Committee would take place on Friday 16 July 2021 at 10:00am.

L Sales
Director of Corporate Services

County Hall
Preston